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SUMMER 2015 ISSUE 303

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TAME THE ELEMENTS

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WELCOME

Worth The Wait

We've been chasing the MV F4 RC for months. Having been promised an exclusive shot on it, we were chomping at the bit to have a go on what is the closest you can get to a WSB racer on the road.

We'd scheduled it in for the last two editions of the magazine, but one problem after another was befalling Dave at Hampshire Motorcycles, who was importing the bike to turn it into his BSB race bike. He must have been pulling his hair out, as it was supposed to be ready for the first BSB test, but rounds have slipped by as MV built the bike up.

We eventually got the call that the bike was in the country, being run in, and that we could have it for the whole of the next day. A quick check of the forecast revealed... sun! Beej pulled out the bonus ball and went down to Portsmouth to ride it back up to Wiltshire on some quiet roads we know.

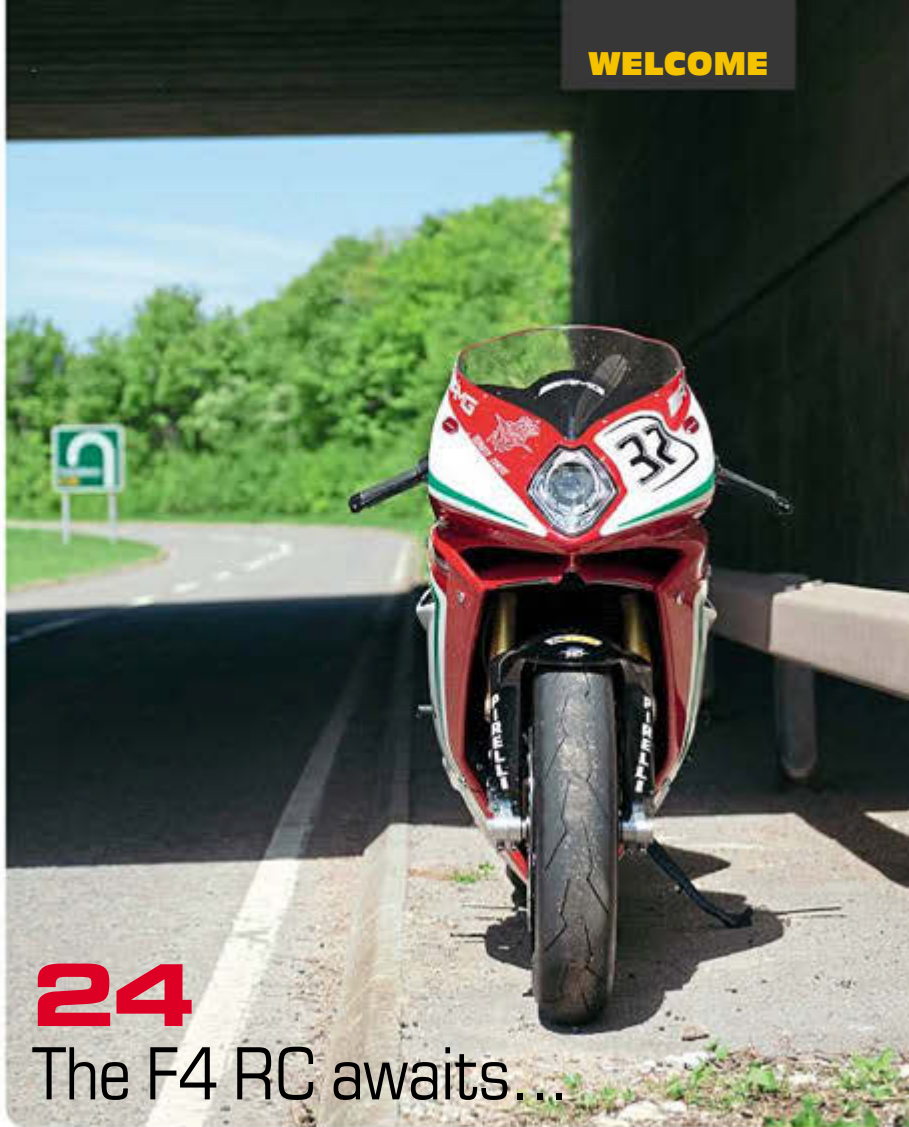
I was half expecting it not to be at our arranged meet up, but when it was my jaw dropped. I've seen plenty of pretty bikes in my time, but the RC is utterly spellbinding. The level of detail on it is astonishing, and it seems that neither form nor function has been compromised one bit. This is said to be the last F4 MV will make, and as a parting shot it is nothing short of magnificent.

We'd started the month on a high as well, Kawasaki lending us the supercharged H2 for a week of fun and frolics. I can't reveal what I got up to on, suffice to say I'm a little bit ashamed of myself for giving in to its temptations. It was a fascinating few days on it, and it's not without its foibles, but the world is certainly a better place for its existence. Wherever I went on it, people stopped and stared, and I've not experienced that level of interest in a bike for a long time. Anything that captures the public's imagination is a good thing.

Which means road racing is a good thing, because a few blokes on my road are well into the North West and TT. They're not bikers, but love the passion, skill and bravery of the participants. It's a fearsome sport, we know, but the love of it – from both fans, organisers, manufacturers and riders – always overrides the setbacks it faces. It wasn't a perfect North West and with TT practice still underway tragedy has already struck, but these races remain the world's ultimate act of freedom.

The month ahead looks ace. So get out, get riding and enjoy!

Rootsy



24

The F4 RC awaits...



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UPFRONT

Upfront

PLANET FAST BIKES - NEW METAL, NEWS & REVIEWS

RC213V-S: MotoGP (not) for the masses

With a whopping great price tag, Honda brings its GP technology to the road.

Curiously debuted at a little known hill climb in Japan (where we picked up on it days before anyone else), Honda's latest – and undoubtedly greatest – race rep finally saw the light of day. This gentle introduction was in stark contrast to its unveiling in Catalunya, where the massed ranks of Honda's top brass and best racers proudly stood by its fantastic machine.

Having seen rivals clean up with über spec'd machinery based on bikes that live on the racetrack, Honda has unveiled its blue riband bike – the RC213V-S. Ducati sold out its (£38,000) Desmosedici and (£55,000) Superleggera, MV Agusta has no more F4 RCs to sell (read all about this in our world exclusive test on page 24), Yamaha has had no trouble flogging its

limited numbers of (£18,499) R1Ms and Kawasaki has no more (£41,000) H2Rs. But what of a machine that will come with a huge price tag – around £140,000 in the UK?

It may come as a shock to see a bike costing well north of £100,000, but never before have you been able to buy a bike so closely resembling a world championship winner. Having spoken to Honda



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HONDA'S LAST SPECIAL

We're not saying that the RC30 and RC45 weren't special machines, because they were, but in terms of radical design and huge price tag they can't hold a candle to the NR750. Aping the NR500's oval piston design (NR stands for New Racing), the elliptical design on the street bike allowed eight valves per cylinder. Developing 125bhp, the 747cc NR developed strong power, but the world had seen more at that point, and the design meant it was heavy, too. Around 300 were built in 1992, at a cost of £38,000 each – at the time it was the world's most expensive production bike. Apparently eight made it into

A technical masterpiece...



the UK, although there are more now. The closest it got to racing was as the marshal bikes at the Suzuka 8-hours...

insiders, it's a machine that isn't going to be making the firm any money. No, the project showcases the abilities of the firm and shows the correlation between racing and the road.

The big boss of HRC, Yoshishige Nomura told us that production numbers will be very limited, what with it being hand built, and reiterated how close it will be to the race machine, "It will almost be identical. The differences will be the fact the MotoGP bike has a seamless gearbox and pneumatic valves, where the road bike will not. The chassis, materials to construct it, machining and processes used to produce and build the road bike will be very similar to the racer and the people who build Marc Marquez's bikes will also be building this road bike on a bespoke production line.

The RC213V-S uses the architecture of Marquez's 1,000cc 90-degree V4, techniques too, with the sandcasting of engine parts one of the constraints on production. Aluminium is used for the crankcases over the race bike's magnesium and internals such as the pistons are beefed



up to increase service life, as well as the switch to valve springs. The exhaust is a full titanium system, but made to incorporate catalytic converters and be legal on emissions and noise. Power is claimed to be 214bhp with the race kit – without it's a lowly 159bhp.

Chassis-wise, the bike takes huge inspiration from the race bike, with a super-stiff pressed and welded aluminium frame with a huge headstock. Unlike Marquez's bike, there will be some adjustability of the riding position. The aluminium swingarm is also visually identical to Marquez's bike, able to be adjusted.

The RC213V-S will be the first Honda sportsbike to use traction control, with the bike possessing an envious electronics package. Allied to this, almost unbuyable Öhlins gas pressurised forks and shock will help control the output. Brembo monoblock brakes are the last resort of control here.

The application of lights, mirrors and a reg plate holder are the only concessions to the road. Design takes its cue from the race bike, but the colours are classic HRC.

IS IT ELIGIBLE FOR WSB?

So long as any manufacturer makes 1,000 units by the second year of racing, you can race it. Honda, however, is saying that flat out it will be producing two of these bikes a day at its special line in the Kumamoto factory – and that's only when things get up to speed. So that's one issue. But the show stopper for WSB is that there's a regulation saying that there is a maximum retail price for a bike – and that figure is €40,000. So this quite categorically rules out the Honda

Don't expect the MotoGP-rep to race in WSB...



competing in WSB (that is until Honda goes about changing the rules...).



MAMBA BITES

A short one this month from our regular ranter.

"I went to the Bike Shed do the other week, you know the show for those with beards, tattoos and bikes they've ruined. I love a bit of tasty metal in lots of different forms, but some of the bikes on show were all a bit, well, pointless really. I'm all up for making a bike look nice, but so many of these bikes are trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Just because you can do it doesn't mean to say that you have to..."

BAG YOURSELF UP

Developing an air bag system for your race suit is no cheap business, that's why we've only seen the big players come up with products for the market. Dainese and Alpinestars are the clear market leaders, with everyone else (Spidi aside) not having the cash reserves to commit. Riders wanting an airbag suit have had to go with these two Italian firms, no matter if they had some preference for another leather suit provider – until now.

Dainese has moved its D-Air system another step forward by effectively developing an undersuit airbag product. D-air Armor uses the 15 years worth of R&D done by the firm and packaged it up not in a race suit but in something that we can all wear under anything else. It's a race product first, and not available to buy, but this will hit the shops in the not too distant future.

This is a pragmatic response to the huge technical and financial difficulties faced by the smaller manufacturers – as well as an exciting avenue for road going customers. An easy to wear undersuit that'll fit under leathers, textiles or just jeans and a jacket has got to be a good thing, boosting safety levels further and being accessible to riders like never before. Top work, Dainese!



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THE GRID OF NEWS

Who's qualified where in this month's news race?

VICTORY AIMING FOR, ER, FIRST PLACE AT THE PEAK

■ Victory is a busy old company at the minute. Not content with having a crack at the TT, it's also roped in Roland Sands to build a bike to have a go at the Pikes Peak race. Victory up to this point wouldn't have stood much of a chance in this historic race, but this Project 156 might. It'll have a prototype motor, run massive 67mm throttle bodies and look absolutely pimping. It's a lot of hassle to make a machine like this just as a brand building exercise, so is it likely that we'll see a butch new roadster accompany the cruisers that the firm already makes?



MARZOCCHI SPRINGS A LEAK

■ It looks like MV and Ducati, among others, will have to start looking elsewhere for certain suspension components, with Marzocchi's American parent company pulling the plug on the Italian suspension firm. Found on such bikes as the MV Brutale and Ducati's base model 1299 Panigale, the firm will cease production in September. While the cycling side of things is booming (this is all made in the Far East), the move to electronic suspension has left Marzocchi in an irrecoverable position according to Tenneco, the conglomerate that owns it.



ZERO INTEREST FOR SUZUKI

■ Is this a sign that we're going to get a new GSX-R1000 in 2016? Suzuki is offering zero per cent finance on the entire GSX-R range, over a whopping 48 months, too – meaning that with a £2,000 deposit (or so) you can pay £179 for a new Gixxer Thou' or for just a quid down a GSX-R750 can be yours for £203 a month. This is on top of bikes already boasting Yoshi R11 exhausts as standard. We've long said that the entire range is brilliant, it's just that there are better bikes about, so why not pay a Suzuki dealer a visit...



YOU DO VUDU?

■ The competition for track training has intensified with Simon Crafar announcing that his Motovudu scheme will be heading for the UK this year. Previous events have been held on the continent, but after enlisting the very able help of former BSB champ and all round legend, John Reynolds, as well as the mega-experienced Dean Skipper. Using a fleet of GSX-R machinery (in all three sizes), the teaching will enable riders to hone their skills at a range of MSVT trackdays over the summer. For more details, head to the website at www.motovudu.com/motovudu_uk



BR-BR-BREAK-IT-DOWN

■ A new player in the recovery market has emerged, with RecoverMe offering a new policy for just £44.99. This includes home start, unlimited recovery mileage, misfuelling and accommodation cover if stranded, so it's pretty loaded for the not-so-loaded. Sign up and an app is used to put you in touch with HQ, who then issue orders to one of its 800 recovery agents to come and rescue you. It works out much cheaper than the usual players, so check out www.recover-me.co.uk



BIKES ON THE UP

■ Bike sales are back in the black, with May offering another big jump in overall bike sales. Month on month sales were up 13 per cent, roughly the same figure for the year to date figures too. Our favourite category of the MCIA's figures, supersports, are up 11 per cent year to date – with Yamaha doing well with its tiddlers in this category. Scoring decent sales results with the Tracer, MT-07, YZF-125R and new YZF R3, Yamaha is nestling just behind Honda in terms of units sold. As they say, if you build them, they will come...



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EVENT

TT 2015: THE BIG ONE

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Want to know how much it means to win a big bike TT at your 16th attempt? This is how much it means to Bruce Anstey.

Post-TT we like to show you an epic shot of a bike at an outrageous angle or flying through the air at 160mph, but there's no better image than this to represent the 2015 TT (so far, we had to go to press on the Tuesday of race week – finger's crossed for a safe rest of the week).

Anstey's maiden superbike win was a colossal achievement for the quietly spoken Kiwi, and a win celebrated the globe over. With the Superbike race held over until the Sunday, Bruce took advantage of a lie-in and stormed all six laps – overhauling a resurgent Ian Hutchinson in the process. The Padgett's Honda Fireblade belied its

age and resigned all of its modern rivals to the status of second – or worse if you're Yamaha...

But take a closer look. No, not at Roald Dahl's The Twits bushy beard to find bits of breakfast in it, but rather at the pummelling his leathers have had on the chest. That's how violent the track is, enough to seriously scuff the sponsor's logo. Then check out the little blister on the index finger. They only get worse the further down the hand, but given Bruce has just muscled 200bhp of 'Blade for over 180-miles, that's not a bad injury to success ratio. And then there's the eyes – utter elation. As we found out last month, Bruce's battle with cancer has taken its toll, but the fire in his belly has always ravaged, and to win his 10th TT clearly means the world to him.

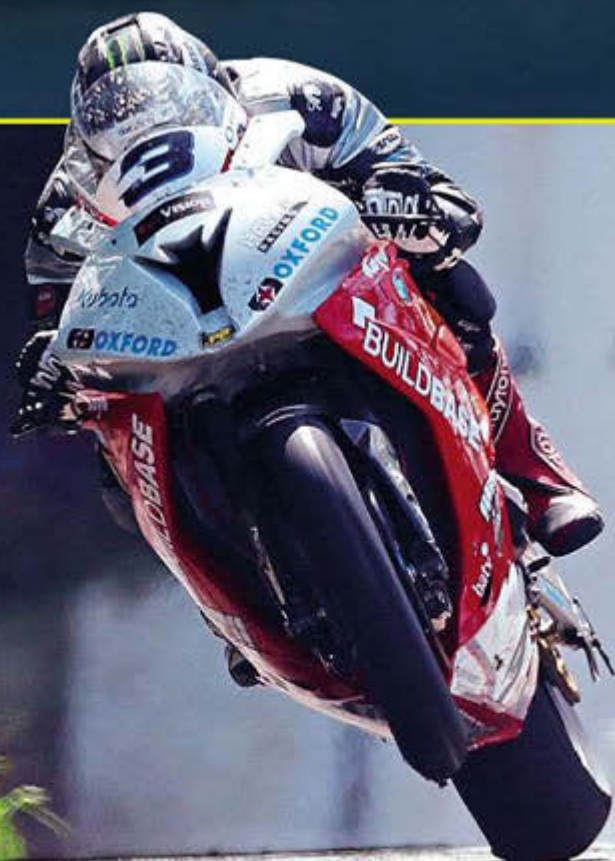
CONCENTRATE...

Bruce Anstey's eyes tell the story here, but they would have been wider than this had an image been captured of him hitting the pavement on his way down Bray Hill in the first supersport race. Marred by the death of Franck Petricola in practice, there were also plenty more spills, with both Dunlop brothers going down, Keith Amor taking a big knock and Gary Johnson lucky to get away with a crash on the Mountain.



SWITCHING SIDES

Michael Dunlop won't care that he's off Yamaha's Christmas card list this year, as his dramatic switch from the R1 to the BMW S 1000 RR proved to be the right choice. A crash took a second place off him, and hampered the rest of his week.



THE SECOND COMING

The Oxford English dictionary has just been reprinted, with a picture of Ian Hutchinson against the words drive, determination and adversity. Hutchy's woes have been well documented, but his recovery from truly devastating leg injuries speak volumes for the Bingley Bullet. Overhauled in the first superbike race, there was no stopping Hutchy in the supersport and superstock races that followed, and not even using the pavement as a berm was enough to prevent him taking his TT victories beyond his stalled nine – his first since that special year in 2010. Credit also needs to go to Paul Bird's team and the TTC squad, who took a risk on Hutchy, but provided machinery capable of delivering victory.



THE KING FIGHTS ON...

You should never write John McGuinness off, and we're not about to, but so far race week has been disappointing for the Morecambe man. "It's so hard and so competitive and TT wins and podiums don't get given out in Christmas crackers," said McPint after his first superbike race where he finished fourth. Comfortable and happy in practice, John was shy of a few seconds of race pace, perhaps due to the technical regulations made this year to the bike which has robbed it of power – the Kawasaki and BMW bikes certainly had the speed through the speed traps, although that didn't stop Bruce Anstey in the first superbike race...



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Gearred Up

ALL THE LATEST, COOLEST & TRICKEST PERFORMANCE PRODUCTS

RACE GLOVES

You've got your one-piece leather suit, you've got the bike and lid – what next? Get yourself a pair of pimping race gloves...

WORDS: CARLI SMITH

Complete the look – and stay protected – with a pair of leather race gloves. There's plenty out there to choose from, for a range of budgets and styles. Your natural reaction in a crash will be to stick your

hand out, so buy the best you can afford so that your hand stands a decent chance of not ending up looking like minced beef. But first off, let's answer a couple of questions.

Why is kangaroo leather so strong?

The leather from the 'Macropus Giganteus' kangaroo is often used when bike clothing manufacturers are looking for a strong, but light material. When used at the same thickness, it is 4-5 times stronger than cowhide – but why is big 'Joey' so strong? Cows, like humans, sweat through pores in their bodies – stay with us, we're going somewhere with this – and as a result there are tiny holes all over the hide. Kangaroos don't, instead they have a single gland at the end of their tails. Bear in mind if you treat yourself to a pair of kangaroo gloves, they need looking after as they are negatively affected by sweat – particularly in comparison to cowhide.

Stingray – on my gloves?!

On some race gloves, stingray is featured on high impact areas. By far, it's one of the most expensive leathers to use, but it's effective. In CE tests – imagine a record deck with the turntable as the asphalt and the stylus holding a sample of the material – it lasted 20,000 revolutions in comparison to kangaroo, which lasted 4,000. So why don't they make suits out of it? Firstly, because it's mega expensive. Secondly, because it's stiff and doesn't provide enough 'feel' through it like kangaroo or cow-hide and lastly, because it's a bit strange and scaly – you'd look a bit weird.

HELD TITAN EVO

£249.99

WWW.HELD-UK.CO.UK



Made from Kangaroo leather, the Titan Evo gloves sound like they come from Greek mythology, but they're packed with the latest tech for protection. They have titanium knuckle protectors, Kevlar protection on the back of the hand, highly-abrasive stingray leather at the ball of the thumbs and knuckles and the base of the thumb and hand-edge are protected by a carbon/aramid shell.

RST TRACTECH EVO R

£89.99

WWW.RST-MOTO.COM

RST has taken its Tractech Evo glove as a base and then gone and spec'd it right up. The firm has added a kangaroo palm and a memory elastane impact knuckle protector – the same material they use in the firm's Aktiv back protector. Pick from black, blue, white, flo green and flo red to match the rest of your ensemble.



SPIDI CARBO TRACK

£219.99

WWW.FERIDAX.COM

According to Spidi, these gloves are the culmination of 35 years of development. Made from 0.8mm full grain leather, the Carbo Track gloves have perforated sections, cowhide palms with Clarino reinforcements, keramide lining and stitching for abrasion and heat resistance – with double stitching on areas exposed in a crash. There are carbon fibre shields on the knuckles, fingers and back of the hand. Tough stuff.



ALPINESTARS GP PRO

£199.95

WWW.ALPINESTARS.COM



After years of development testing on MotoGP and WSB circuits, the GP Pro is a glove that has been honed to perfection. Made from full grain leather with a kangaroo palm and synthetic suede palm reinforcements, the GP Pro features Dynamic Friction Shield protectors and ventilation throughout. There's a finger bridge, finger sliders and a wrist cuff design for maximum protection.

SPADA CURVE

£74.95

WWW.SPADACLOTHING.CO.UK



Spada's full race-spec glove retails for under £75. They have full grain cow aniline leather on the palm and the back of the hand is goat leather. There's a cantilever knuckle system, TPU resistant moulds on the fingers for protection, stretch panels for improved fit and rubber padding on the outer palm with stingray leather for added impact and abrasion resistance.

DAINESE CARBON GORE-TEX X TRAFIT

£174.99

WWW.DAINESE.COM

Whilst these gloves own a 'race' spec, they also have a breathable and waterproof Gore-tex membrane meaning you can look the part, be protected and stay dry in the lovely British weather. Made mainly from cowhide leather, they have a goatskin palm that is reinforced with digital and amica suede.



FURYGAN AFS18

£99.99

WWW.NEVIS.UK.COM

Made from 100 per cent goat leather for softness and comfort, the AFS-18 gloves feature Furygan's Skin Protect lining, external protection shells for the scaphoid, metacarpals, palm, fingers and side of the hand. There's double leather and additional foam on areas exposed in a crash. Hot and sweaty hands are a thing of the past as there are air channels positioned on the top of the gloves and perforated leather in strategic places. Compared to the old model, the wrist and cuff adjusters have added stretch.



RICHA X-PRO

£129.99

WWW.NEVIS.UK.COM



A combination of kangaroo, cow and goat leather has been used on the X-Pro glove. They feature titanium CE knuckle protectors, a TPU Knox palm and a TPU cuff protector with a double Velcro wrist closure for a snug fit. Available in black with white detailing and white with black details.

OXFORD RP-1

£69.99

WWW.OXPROD.COM

This year, Oxford Products launched a range of one-piece leather suits – and these race gloves to go with them. For less than £70 you could bag yourself a pair of full-spec leather race gloves – proving you don't always have to pay top dollar to get top spec. They are made from aniline leather – a natural looking leather, coloured only with dye – with Aramid anti-abrasion reinforcements in vulnerable places.



KNOX HANDROID

£169.99

WWW.PLANET-KNOX.COM

There are a few gloves to choose from in the Knox range, but these are our favourites and they've won no end of awards. Made from aniline leather with a kangaroo leather palm, they have a cuff slider, wrist slider and a scaphoid protection system on the palm. Did you know that the second most commonly broken bone in a man is the scaphoid? We love the exoskeleton, terminator-esque, finger and knuckle spines on the tops of the fingers and thumb. They fasten up using the Knox Boa lacing system – with a simple dial that tightens the gloves equally from all sides for a great fit. Top job.



RACER HIGH RACER

£149.99

WWW.TRANAM.CO.UK



These gloves from Racer have kangaroo leather along the entire inside of the hand and carbon protectors on the knuckles, fingers and cuff for protection. There is special Knox hand armour protecting the scaphoid bone in the inner wrist – and these even say 'Racer' on them...

AKITO SPORTS RIDER

£49.99

WWW.GROUPLOYD.COM

The Sports Rider gloves have a pre-curved cut for comfort and moulded polyurethane knuckle panels and finger sliders for safety. There's double leather in impact zones, stretch panels on the fingers and a double wrist strap with carbon leather panels for a snug fit. With reflective printing and a thermal fleece lining, they look the part but will also keep your hands warm.



WEISE SHARK

£109.99

WWW.THEKEYCOLLECTION.COM

Weise say these gloves are 'equally at home on track or on tour' – made from full grain leather, they have a waterproof, windproof and breathable lining which is attached without stitching – clever. Knox SPS scaphoid protection is fitted on the palms and integrated TPU reinforcement shields the knuckles and fingers. A leather 'bridge' connects the ring and little fingers to prevent them bending apart in an accident.



Gearred Up

ALL THE LATEST, COOLEST & TRICKEST PERFORMANCE PRODUCTS

ARAI: RX7-7V

■ Arai isn't a firm that just bashes out new models. The incumbent top of the range lid, the RX-7 has been in service since 2008, so the new RX-7V is a lid we've been waiting some time for. Thankfully, it seems that the waiting was all worth it. The 7V uses a new resin compound in the outer shell, called PB-SNC2, which improves the 'stick' between each layer, saving 30 grams in the process. Ventilation is improved to the tune of 11 per cent, with bigger switches better for quick access to the outside air. The visor system is all new, with a new locking function too, so no more gritting your teeth to take the old one off. This new shape allows an extra 3mm of room in front of your face. The new liner is all washable, a traditional D-ring is your closure mechanism and the lid comes with a five year warranty. Given making each shell can take 27 steps and that it takes 18 man hours to knock one up, it comes as no surprise to see its premium pricing. But this in an Arai, and we've come to expect that of a product that really is the crowning achievement of this Japanese firm. Plain lids start at penny short of £600.

£599.99

www.whyarai.co.uk



TOMTOM: RIDER 400

■ It's getting harder for sat nav manufacturers to get riders interested in new products, when their old stuff and easily downloadable apps do the job of getting you from A to B so well. But TomTom has tackled the problem head on with its new Rider 400 unit that covers 45 countries in Europe – but not Australia, this isn't the Eurovision now... Not only does it do what it's supposed to do, but the engineers behind it have added a few funky features to seek out the best winding roads, top climbs and offering the ability to explore an area. On top of all of this, the unit will last for six hours without a charge, so it's not crucial to hardwire it on, it gives speed camera locations (for life, too), and comes with all the fittings you need to hook it onto your bike.



£319.99

www.tomtom.com

WEMOTO: BODYWORK

■ If you're after a new set of fairings for your bike (and we can't imagine why because you'd never crash a bike, would you?), then Wemoto may have the answer. Wemoto reckons that for the price of a single OE panel, they can supply the lot for you. They kits come pre-painted and lacquered, so all you have to do is fit them, and thanks to the same mounting points as standard, that shouldn't be much of a struggle.

£320.00

www.wemoto.com



VALVOLINE: SYNPOWER OIL

■ Big in the US, the Valvoline brand is making inroads into the UK market on the back of their sponsorship of Clive Padgett's TT-winning race team. So if you like the look of the Fireblades that sport the brand's logo, you can also run the black gold inside in the form of this Synpower oil. On top of this 10W40 oil, there's a range of other sprays and tonics to ensure your bike stays in perfect working order. Waxes, lubes, cleaners – the whole caboodle is catered for – go get yourself some...

£17.00

www.valvolineurope.com

DUCATI: COURSE WINDPROOF JACKET

■ Unlike a lot of Ducati's other official clothing, this windproof jacket is provided courtesy of Rev'it, and haven't they done a good job of it. Everyone likes a bit of full factory clothing, and this jacket is just that. It uses a soft shell WindBarrier material with a windproof membrane that sits on a fleece liner. As it's stretchy, you could wear it over leathers on a chilly morning or on its own on your way down to the boozer. It's not a technical garment, so there's no armour in it or owt, but that doesn't detract from us wanting one. Hello, is that Ducati? About that jacket...

£145.00

www.ducatiuk.com



R&G RACING: BOOT GUARDS

■ We know all too well of the damage a set of boots can do to a bike, with us scuffing more swingarms than we care to think about. Forget about a 110mph off, just tapping up and down the gearbox is enough to rob you of your bike's pristine look. Pre-cut in either two or four pieces, you stick these guards on using the adhesive that backs them and then Bob's you're uncle and Fanny's your aunt. A clever idea that should have made an appearance years ago. Top job!

£34.99

www.rg-racing.com



KNOX: DRY INSIDE

■ The latest collection from Fort Knox concentrates on the inside, rather than the outside. The new UK made Dry Inside range is subtly designed, suiting where they'll be worn, and are made from top quality Merino wool. Called MerinoPerform Advantage, this Aussie wool made from lambs scrotums (probably not, but it's that soft it's what it feels like) works in a technical capacity too, what with it offering cooling characteristics as well as being fast drying. There are seven garments in all, and they suit all year use.

FROM £29.99

www.planet-knox.com



K-TECH: RAZOR R SHOCK

■ Knowing that there's more and more little bikes on the streets, K-Tech is tempting owners of said diminutive machinery with a fancy new shock for their wheels. The Razor-R transforms what was your cheap, naff unit into an absolute cracker, offering compression and rebound adjustment as well as spring preload and length adjustment being able to be fiddled with. Boasting a 35mm piston and 14mm shaft the Razor R also uses a hose mounted remote reservoir and is nitrogen pressurized so you get better damping consistency. Most of these small bikes could do with an upgrade in this department, so get saving your pocket money now for a bit of fancy K-Tech.

£714.00

www.k-tech.uk.com



OXFORD PRODUCTS: SPANNER SET 1

■ Need a spanner set on your life? Of course you do, and Oxford Products has come up with this little number. For less than 25 notes you're getting yourself an 11-piece chrome vanadium spanner set that goes from 6mm to 17mm with a 19mm to finish with. Packaged in a neat storage system for easy access, what's not to like here?

£24.99

www.oxprods.com

ALPINESTARS: CHARGER R BACKPACK

■ If you've got 18 litres of stuff to carry then the latest rucksack from Alpinestars looks to be right up your street. Not only does it carry whatever you need, but it'll do it all in comfort thanks to decent ergonomics and aerodynamics. Made with 600 denier fabric (1200 on the base), it's tough with the thermoformed PU hard shell just adding to the strength. There's a waterproof rain cover inside just in case the shower turns into a downpour. Not cheap, but quality isn't...

£89.99

www.alpinestars.com





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MV AGUSTA

All good things must come to an end, they say, and for MV Agusta's F4 lineage, it's right at the very end where things have really peaked...

The first thing I see after I hear the van's horn parp, are two sets of tonsils right at the back of two wide open, gaping maws. Said gobs are swiftly replaced with two mobile phones. I can't hear the 'snick, snick, snick' of the shutters snapping away, but I know they are furiously trying to get a clear image of me. When they're done, they hold station and then the driver winds down his window, shouting over the 70mph wind's din, "Is that the RC mate?"

Had I been able to answer him coherently, I would have replied, 'Yes, my dear sir, yes it is the RC'. The MV Agusta F4 RC to be precise, and if what we're told is actually factual, I'm the first person outside of the MV Agusta factory to be riding one. Anywhere, or anytime. In the world. Wow...

Not quite true, I know, as Dave from Hampshire MV Agusta did a couple of laps of town on his brand new bike to make sure all was gravy before handing me the keys. So, second person then, if you're getting picky.

While we should probably be basking in this kind of rare glory, the truth is the bike is already far surpassing any happy feelings getting something first generates. And I'm only on the motorway, I haven't even done anything meaningful, but my inner biking child is yelling and whooping like a maniac. More so in fact, after my encounter with two van-based enthusiasts. The grins on their faces seeing and recognising what will be an extremely rare machine matches my own that I'm sporting under my lid.

As the RC burbles along just above legal pace, with the full Termignoni race system bellowing, fuelling perfectly, and feeling fit for purpose, I mull over how MV got to this point.

The F4 range is getting on a bit now, starting, of course, with the 750 version towards the end of the last century. The 1000 came along from 2004 and instantly set tongues and wallets wagging. She was gorgeous, fast and handled well once you got a proper grip on her. Yet the F4 was far from perfect, for a variety of different reasons.

Some may say reliability, others may cite user friendliness, or their friends may claim it was way too much hard work to get that jewel of a reward when it all came together. All true in their own way, to differing degrees. But one thing is for sure though – every single year it got better and better, and closer to matching its Italian brethren and the Japanese.

WORDS:
BENJAMIN J
KUBAS CRONIN
PICS:
AS DESIGN



F4 RC





Getting into the RC groove

It also went through a huge amount of development, and a near bewildering array of versions over its 11-year life span. You could get lost in the myriad of special editions; the Mamba, the CC, the Ago, the 312 and on and on. All of these commanded a hefty asking price over whatever passed for a standard F4 in their respective years of issue. Whether they were worth it or not was simply down to perspective of whoever bought them, but they were extremely special nonetheless.

Which is something MV always seemed to get right on a bike that barely changed its look since the 750 was introduced. Each special edition had its own kudos and a perceptible air of value, which held it above other manufacturer specials. Sure, they may have been faster around a track, or just as rare. But they weren't an MV Agusta, they didn't have

that essence of hand crafted joy.

I remember a few years ago becoming momentarily miffed that MV didn't change the look of the F4 much. Initially I thought it was lazy, then I surmised MV had simply run out of ideas and didn't want to risk what had happened to Ducati when they retired the iconic 916 shape. A little later on, however, I finally got it, I understood why. Much like Porsche and the 911 silhouette, the F4's classic Tamburini design needs to be adhered to on any version carrying its soon to be legendary moniker. They can stray a little left or right from the original, but the design is so timeless that even now in 2015 it still looks incredible. All MV had to do was continually reinvent the core of the bike, boost the performance and spec' sheet, and the looks kept the rest of the vibe alive.

Yet it wasn't until 2012 that the F4 came of age, in terms of taking the fight to the competition. MV never really needed to

compete with the big names, but that particular update spread itself across three models – the F4, F4 R and F4 RR – and made it a bike which couldn't be excluded from group tests any longer. We then began to hear rumours that the F4 line may be coming to an end, and that there would one final hurrah, a last bastion of the F4 family that would cement its place in the annals of sportsbike history. That bike would turn out to be the F4 RC, which MV claim is basically a WSB bike for the road.

It's not the most expensive F4 ever created (that title belonging to the F4 CC at €100k), but at £30,999 it is one of the priciest machines on the market today. But it's also vying for the most special, desirable and lusted after titles too.

When we got wind that it would be a limited production run, we immediately begged MV for the opportunity to ride one before they all got snapped up. Lucky for us



Should be in an art gallery...



The F4's last dash



RR wheels on this RC

DAVE TYSON – BOSS MAN AT MV HAMPSHIRE

It's his RC, so we best let him get in on the action!

"It's mega, isn't it? It's the last of the Tamburini designed F4s ever to be made, so it's a really collectable thing. For a race bike it's a real 200bhp rear-wheel machine that anyone can buy, use on the road and look like Leon Camier. It's got all the bits we always thought an F4 should have. They've put it all on making it a really competitive bike, and therefore a real challenge to the R1, BMW and Aprilia on the road. There's lots of nice components, like titanium conrods, trick pistons and all that kind of stuff. It just shows the brand is moving forwards and not going backwards. They've fitted titanium bolts to everything, even the horn bracket and starter relay, all held by titanium bolts. I think it's Polini titanium, they're Italians, and it is hideous money. If I were to buy all the bolts from a UK company, it'd be over £3,000. Even the nuts are titanium too. Then you've got the Termignoni system, and the carbon box, it's such a special package. I think if anyone were to run one in Superstock it'd be a really competitive package, if it gets in the price range! If you're hankering for the trickiest, most powerful and fastest thing out there the RC must be on your shopping list. It's also by far the prettiest bike in the world. It's such a nice bit of kit, with some really nice touches. I love things like the full carbon airbox over the old plastic moulded one. We may have one or two we can still get by the time you read this, and if you do buy one through us you get a day out at BSB with our race team, including hospitality, etc. If you want one (and who wouldn't? – Ed), get in touch!"

Into the light!



ROOTSY'S OPINION

Only a company like MV can make a machine like this. Being so small and with such an involving boss at the tiller, all it takes is Giovanni Castiglioni to give the nod on a project like this and it happens. Other larger firms need studies, research, consultancy, and who knows else before a project can start and what hoops Japanese firms had to go through to get the likes of the Kawasaki H2R and the imminent Honda RC213V-S is anyone's guess. But at MV, these things just happen. It's how it should be. And how happy are we that Castiglioni gave the RC the thumbs up – although having said that, we'll temper that by saying that bikes of this calibre always fill us with a fair degree of anxiety. Race reps, and there is no racier rep than this, are inherently designed to appeal to the man in pitlane, not the man in the street. Consequently, while they might look the epitome of enticement they can be nothing but an utter bastard to ride. That's why my mouth had dried when it was my turn on the bike. Having ridden down to the photoshoot on the Suzuki GSX-S1000, my easy time in the saddle had now ended. What I was presented with now was a jewel of a bike, one that contrastingly says spank me and cherish me at the same time. But you can't pussyfoot about with a thoroughbred race rep, especially when the magazine cover is on the line, so I went out and gave it my best Leon Camier impression. It's fair to say that Leon's day job is safe, but far from the belligerent monster of a ride I was expecting, the RC performed as mild manneredly as I could have hoped for. You take your cue from the motor in an instant like this, and the RC's wasn't the bomb blast I was expecting. Sure, it was hard, linear and brutal, but it wasn't as if I was quivering at the thought of asking to mainline another hit of the MV's class A. The chassis, too, had an encompassing air about it. Even though I did about a million passes for the camera, it still felt as if I'd not even scratched the surface of its abilities. A circuit would have been the best place to start this process, but for road work it wasn't a million miles off. With the shop closing in an hour, and me 80-miles away from said establishment, it was time to do one, so I gunned it back hoping that the trade plate would blow off at some point giving me complete anonymity. Given the fact it had no mirrors, I felt that the safest course of action was to be the fastest thing on the road, negating the need to do anything but the most cursory of lifesavers. Throughout the ride, all I wanted was for a line of everyone I know to see me on the coolest bike I'd ever ridden, but that treat was reserved for the bemused strangers of the South's A-roads, the lucky bastards!

Rootsy's Verdict 10/10

then, that Dave Tyson from MV Hampshire, with MV's blessing, allowed us to ride the bike that will become his BSB machine. It had just began its BSB transformation before we got our hands on it, which meant some of the race kit parts had been fitted, including that gorgeous full titanium exhaust system – ss if the specification wasn't delicious enough out of the crate...

Yes, it has some terrific top-drawer Öhlins suspension on it, but it's what's under the skin that impresses the most. The liberal use of magnesium, titanium and carbon fibre for a start. Then there's the engine spec, including titanium rods and super-lightened everything. MV has made it so that if you want to go racing on it, just fit the race kit from the box, remove the road gubbins and you're away. Or, you have a 200bhp plus track bike with little chance of seeing another RC short of an MV only trackday.

So it was with a mild amount of trepidation that I set off on the bike from Hampshire MV Agusta, if I'm honest. This was going to be a race bike soon, and when we rode it the only one that had been built. No pressure... My journey was going to take in some motorway miles, super quick A-roads and nadgery B-roads on my way to meet Rootsy, and it was on the first part where I came across the RC's first admirers.

Even the small bits are lovely



MAGNESIUM

There's rather a lot of it on the RC, including the cylinder head and engine cases. At least eleven major parts of the engine are made from magnesium, and that itself is filled with titanium and super-light steel parts. Even the horn is apparently held in with titanium bolts. MV has gone to town here alright!

SHIFTY WIFTY

There is a quickshifter on the RC, though strangely no down-shift blipper as stock, even though all its other 2015 machines seem to have it as standard. We have been told the race ECU can enable this, though it does seem like a tiny miss considering the attention that's been paid to the rest of the bike.



Waving bye to the fan van, I pressed on for a few dozen more motorway miles. What strikes me right away is how pliant this 'race bike' is. The seat pad is thin but comfortable, the riding position feels wonderfully natural with the bike ready to respond to minimal input, and it's fuelling particularly well too. It's loud, but not overbearingly excessive, and thus far it's been a steady and thoroughly competent introduction to MV's latest flagship.

Soon enough we're off drudgery way though, and into the RC's real element. It's also now that, away from prying eyes, I'm able to give it the full beans. We know the F4 is fast, in fact last year at Portimao the RR was quicker down the home straight than BMW's HP4. But this, this is something else entirely. And I'm not just talking about sheer acceleration either, even though it rips through the midrange and into the upper reaches quickly, but with an extremely wholesome feeling of raw power. No, it's the way that right when you expect it to start tailing off, it actually starts accelerating harder. It's at this point you realise you really are on a race bike for the road, because only competition bikes have this trait.

We've ridden plenty of WSB bikes before, and most feel reasonably similar to the proddy machine they're based on – until you get over 10,000rpm. That's where the difference is both palpable and mind-blowing. That also sums up the RC at the top of its rev range. When it's accelerating hard there's not much I can think of that may be able to match it. It blew my socks off, and bear in mind that two the days before I rode the RC I'd actually spent on the Kawasaki H2. That's so stupidly

ENGINE Every one of the RC's engines is hand built, and the unit has seen lots of modifications to bring it up to near WSB spec. The bore and stroke remain similar to the current RR version, but it's the extensive use of magnesium that drops the weight off the lump. The cylinder head, clutch and chain cover, gearbox selector, labyrinth blow-by, alternator, ABS pick-up, sump and oil duct are all made from it. All bolts and screws are titanium. The rods, pistons and crankshaft have all been lightened while new intake ducts grace the variable-length system. The upper injectors are Marelli, the lower ones are Mikuni. The lump is tamed by the MVICS electronics system and ECU, including traction control, up-shift and a whole host of engine options.

CHASSIS The CrMo tubular steel trellis chassis is TIG welded by hand, and complimented by alloy plates for the swingarm pivot. Dimensions are the same as the F4 RR. The front fork is a multi-adjustable Öhlins NIX30 affair, with bespoke cartridges made to MV's specifications. An Öhlins TTX36 monoshock suspends the rear, and the adjustable steering damper is also by Öhlins. Carbon fibre is widely used, as is titanium for bolts and so forth to drop the weight. The battery is also specific to the RC, itself very light. The wheels are specially made forged alloy items. This bike ran on RR wheels as the RC ones weren't ready. Brembo M50 calipers stop the show, biting 320mm discs.

fast that I didn't expect the RC to bowl me over, yet it did, and then some. She's got an ultra addictive stomp curve, the result of which means going slow on open roads is a real challenge for any biker with even an ounce of soul. Yes, she'll dribble along, but you don't want that really, not when she's got the stamina and excitability of a filthy teenager, yet the class of a European princess. It's one hell of a wild ride that you can never keep leashed for too long, the temptation to misbehave is simply too strong.

Speaking of which, it wasn't long after hitting my favourite A-road that I chanced upon a fellow on a cross-plane R1. As I approached him I was just wondering whether to overtake, when he looked in his mirrors and gunned it. Perfect! The next f15 miles or so were spent shadowing this guy as he went faster and faster, trying to stop the RC from filling his mirrors. During this dice I got a real master-class in handling etiquette from the MV. As you'd imagine, the road holding is immense. The biggest difference is the weight loss though, you can really feel it's helped the bike attain a level of agility that previous versions were skirting. It's still not a rapier by

any means, but it doesn't need to be. The F4 only needed that little extra (or less, in this case) in the agility department to back up stupendously awesome stability deep into a turn, to complete its handling package. The weight loss ticked that box putting it immediately on a par with any rival you care to throw at it. Mid-corner, its prowess apes other sibling F4's abilities, in that it's virtually unflappable and with the newfound turn of speed it spears into and through a bend in the most accurate way possible.

The other big advantage is that its form has been designed with the rider in mind, and as such is a cinch to brace yourself on it. In fact you rarely need try, the position promotes rider and bike stability like no other. So when you hammer those insanely powerful Brembo M50 calipers you hardly need to clench your knees as you're locked in, and all your concentration can be utilised to getting in and out of a turn as fast as you can.

It's a wonderfully symbiotic relationship, and yet the RC still manages to feel raw, rough and ready. That attitude and character continually bubbles away underneath its smart suit, in a way a BMW S 1000 RR could

TRIM RIMS

The wheels on the bike we rode, you can probably tell, aren't the same as those in the studio static here. That's because the special extra light RC wheels were not ready in time when this one was built.

ELECTRONICS

The RC comes with a wealth of engine adjustment, much like most MVs do these days. The ride-by-wire raps with the MVICS system to help lord it over the eight-stage traction control. However, you can also adjust the throttle sensitivity, the torque setting, engine braking, engine response and the rev limiter all off the dash. It's a clever thing, no other manufacturer gives you this amount of control over your engine.

POWER

As stock, the bike makes a claimed 205bhp at the crank, which should equate to anywhere around 180-190bhp. That's a lot of power. But stick on the kit parts from the box of goodies, and that goes up to 212bhp, which should see it streak north of 190bhp at the wheel. And that is proper national spec' superbike territory. With lights...



BOX OF DELIGHTS

Each of the 250 RC owners will receive a special carbon fibre box with their purchase. In this box there is the race kit, a certification trophy and an owner's manual also made from carbon fibre. However, it's the shiny bits inside that really interest us. Stick all of this on and the bike loses 7kg taking it to 175kg overall. That's 13kg lighter than an F4 RR. Inside there is a full titanium Termignoni exhaust system with a carbon heat shield. There's also a dedicated ECU for the new exhaust and to bring it up to a full (crank-based) 212bhp. To switch it to track



use, there's a carbon fibre rear seat cowl, a quick-release fuel cap, anodized Ergal mirror plugs and a personalised cover for the entire bike. You can also pre-choose which numbers adorn the RC, too. This addition to the bike further underlines how special it is to own the final ever F4.

Closed private road, etc...



GIOVANNI CASTIGLIONI

We ask MV's big cheese for his thoughts on the RC...

"The F4 RC is the fastest and lightest F4 ever built and is dedicated to connoisseurs who are looking for a collectible motorcycle. As I said during the Turismo Veloce introduction, we're working on a new four-cylinder platform so there will not be an F4. This bike has been a milestone in motorcycle history, an icon of our brand and for sure when there will be a new four-cylinder sportsbike the name will be a different one, meaning this will be the last evolution of F4 as we know it, which will add to its kudos and collectability in MV history."



FIRST RIDE



Matching leathers? Sheer coincidence!



That's a lot of magnesium...

only ever dream about. No other traditional inline-four on the market can match its essence, and that's a fact.

Eventually, the fellow on the R1 went a different route, and the RC and I ploughed on until we came up behind someone on the R1's wee brother, the R6. As if there was something in the air that day, this guy also burned rubber down the A36 as soon as he spotted me. This time I was able to keep the MV in a higher gear and roll the power on and off to stay with the little 600 that was screaming its poor knackers off. Whoever you were, fair play, you gave that bike a proper caning. But the RC barely stretched its legs, an example of just how potent it can be at three-figure speeds, even when it's not trying – like some big WSB scooter.

After following him for a few miles of frolics, I settled into my own journey. The

next hundred miles or so was some of the most memorable I've ever had, and now weeks later I'm rather relived nothing has come through the door because by rights I should be reluctantly reaching for the soap by now. With the day nearly over I rolled up to meet Roots, who directed a expletive filled greeting towards us, before taking the keys and heading off at speed to have his own RC adventure, the lucky bugger.

So that was that done, and what an experience it was. It's a poignant thing, riding the last of a kind. What was more impressive was how the bike behaved being in a transitory state between road and race. For example, while the electronics all worked the quickshifter wasn't active. It didn't matter. With just over one mile on the dash it was a bit notchy, but by the time 150 rolled round it was slickly bedded in. I also kept it in 'Corse'

mode too, which felt fine, even though the option to adjust a wealth of features was open to me – apart from the TC, which I always feel on MVs is better on a very low setting. The hardest part of this test was trying to think of negatives, apart from price (which is backed up by spec admittedly). There's no down-shift blipper and it owns a tall first gear, I struggled to find anything I'd consider close to 'wrong'.

That the bike is also this good, considering its design basis is over a decade old, is also laudable and testament to what MV can achieve when it really puts its mind to it. Well done all, and thanks very much for the opportunity. We really can't wait to see what comes next from Varese. Roll on 2016!

THANKS TO

A massive thank you to Mark from MV Agusta UK, and especially Dave Tyson from Hampshire MV Agusta for loaning us his bike. Head to www.hampshiremvagusta.co.uk for great deals, more MV goodness and maybe, just maybe, your own RC!

TECHNICAL MV AGUSTA F4 RC



ENGINE	Type	998cc, radial-valve, DOHC, inline four
	Bore x Stroke	13.4:1
	Compression	79 x 50.9mm
	Fuelling	Electronic fuel-injection
	Claimed Power	212bhp @ 13,600rpm
	Claimed Torque	115Nm @ 9,300rpm
CHASSIS	Frame	CrMo Steel trellis
	Front Suspension	43mm NIX30 Öhlins fork, fully adjustable
	Rear Suspension	Öhlins TTX-36 monoshock, fully adjustable
	Front Brakes	Four piston calipers, 320mm discs
	Rear Brakes	Four piston caliper, 210mm disc
DIMENSIONS	Wheelbase	1,430mm
	Seat Height	830mm
	Kerb Weight	183kg (175kg Race)
	Fuel Capacity	17L
PRICE	Price	From £30,999
	From	www.mvagusta.com



Highlights

- ▶ Only 250 built
- ▶ Last ever F4
- ▶ WSB on the road
- ▶ Titanium everything
- ▶ 212bhp (claimed)
- ▶ 175kg

TRACK 10
Well, it's going to be, isn't it?

FAST ROAD 10
We didn't expect that!

HOOLIGAN 5
Far too classy

NEW RIDER 1
On what planet?

DESIRABILITY 11
Because 10 isn't enough

Verdict 10/10

Utterly brilliant, wonderfully special and final limited edition of MV's most iconic production bike the factory has ever built. Ciao, bella...

- + STYLE, POWER, HANDLING, BUILD, RARITY
- WE WILL NEVER GET TO OWN ONE...



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HARLEY-DAVIDSON LIVEWIRE

You probably thought that Harley-Davidson was all a bit backwards when it comes to building bikes? Time to think again...

WORDS: ROOTSY PICS: CHIPPY WOOD

What's the first thing you think about when Harley-Davidson is mentioned? Yeah, us too. So a battery-powered bike is probably the last thing you'd associate with this most traditional of bike manufacturers, but this is exactly what we're testing today at the Millbrook proving ground as part of what the firm is calling its Project LiveWire Experience.

The LiveWire refers to the bike, and unlike other live wires, Harley is wanting lots of us to touch it, interact with it and play with it in an attempt to understand what we all want from the next generation of motorcycles. And given the weather, it's going to get wet, dispelling the notion that electricity and water don't mix.

So the bike is essentially a concept, but one that Harley hopes to develop into a production machine. So far, 7,000 people have given the LiveWire a shot (mainly in the States), where nearly 90 per cent of those folks have given the bike the thumbs up (albeit without knowing what the cost might be). This all

means that H-D is likely to produce a battery powered bike some time soon.

But what of the bike itself? Despite the insistence of the orange and black shirted staff present, the LiveWire doesn't have a particular look of a Harley. It looks like your typical battery powered bike, the powerpack and motor sandwiched between two wheels. Strip the logo off what would otherwise be the tank and it all looks fairly generic. The air cooled engine in whatever guise is so crucial to Harley as a brand, so central to every one of its bike, and without it the LiveWire seems bereft of any of its essential Harley-ness.

Components, however, are all thoroughly decent and not robbed off a mountain bike like some early electric models we've seen. The wheels are nicely designed, the forks chunky and purposeful and the frame has been made into an attractive feature – it's light, too, weighing in at just 6.3 kilos. This figure then leads into a question – that being where the other 203.7 kilos are hidden...

Much of the weight is naturally taken up with the lithium-ion battery pack. The motor itself is a longitudinal three-phase AC motor built inside the billet aluminium casings with a single speed gearbox. The relevant figures with regards to the performance are that in the bike's more economical Range mode, you'll get 85km out of it – halve that for the Power mode. So forget your peanut tanks, this is a peanut range. 74bhp with a flat 70.5Nm at any throttle opening are the old school power figures. A charge takes 3.5 hours.

I had about 15 minutes on the bike to make my assessment, but fortunately managed to jump the queue and get a second shot on it, so I managed to try both power settings out (you can't currently flick between them on the fly).

It becomes quickly clear that there's a lot of convention to the ergonomics of the bike; so it owns a thoroughly normal riding position like many naked bikes on the market – although this would probably be deemed radical in Harley circles. The only thing I didn't like were the underslung mirrors robbed from the Forty-Eight.





Now an energy source!



No fill-up here, thanks...



On a Harley?

If the tablet-like dash is on (it's touchscreen too), that means the bike is ready to roll (literally, if you're downhill as there's no parking brake) and the slightest of throttle inputs gets the bike moving. Low speed control is easy, and without any clutch to worry about the LiveWire is anything but at low speeds. But at the first opportunity it was time to, er, gas it, at which point the LiveWire dispelled plenty of preconceived thoughts about both Harleys and electric bikes. It's got plenty of shove, and though hard to judge you'd put it alongside the likes of the SV650 in terms of dynamic ability. Power is directly proportional to throttle input, so there are no surprises (so long as you don't run over a wet white line) as the bike accelerates. Round Millbrook's bowl, it climbed to above 90mph – with more to go – thus it delivers in terms of performance.

It's simple to ride, but a motorcycle needs to engage and all this is a bit too simple. Handling-wise, the use of the 18-inch front wheel gives the bike a distant feeling, not helped by the damp conditions. Ditch the Michelin Scorcher tyres and you'd be rewarded with more confidence, especially in the wet. The bike's weight is felt as the bike moves side to side, but you could easily picture the LiveWire making plenty of progress in town, especially as the turning circle is good, power easily applied and the chassis having an agile air to it.

And town is where we typically imagine these bike will live, not least because of the range limitations. Acceleration is upped further in the Power mode, to impressive levels (even up Millbrook's steep hills where the LiveWire pulled with vigour), but then the battery life evaporates the more fun you have. At one point I had 54 per cent of battery left and I thought that was pretty good, until I spied that that equated to a range of just 17 miles... The system does incorporate a recharge system through the brakes, but you'll need to descend Mont Ventoux to put anything like a meaningful charge back in on the brakes.

But there was nothing here that made the ride a 'Harley' ride. And therein lies the problem for all bike manufacturers tempted down this route. Electric motors have next to no character, whereas the bikes we've all been brought up on were packed with the stuff thanks to their capacity, class and configuration. Two strokes, four strokes, twins, triples, fours, sixes – they all offer a different experience from an engine that operates in a strictly linear and constant fashion. There's no powerband, no playful nature, no stunts, no over-run, no backing in – although there's also next to no servicing with the engine. With just the whine of the motor to drown out the wind noise, there's also little in the way of aural satisfaction too. Which just leaves handling and styling left

to play with. Here, H-D has made progress, but average handling and generic styling belie the radical steps that have been made by the Milwaukee boys.

Given the LiveWire is a concept model, it's hard to know what would feature on a production bike, but at least in grasping the nettle Harley should be congratulated. And in dipping a toe in the water in this fashion we can all help shape what future machines will be like rather than being surprised by a machine developed in secret. If the clamour for the bike is to be believed, then we can expect something like the LiveWire from Harley-Davidson in the near future, where it'll probably sell in droves in California's cool spots to sit alongside the Prius or Tesla. Elsewhere the hold of the internal combustion engine will be strong for years to come, no matter who makes the machine – all while the question of where the electricity comes from in the first place is conveniently ignored...



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Highlights

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- Machined motor cases
- Colour TFT screen
- Nissin brakes
- 210kg (dry)
- 71Nm
- 74bhp (claimed)
- **£Not for sale**

- **TRACK** 4
Scalextric?
- **FAST ROAD** 5
But not for long!
- **HOOLIGAN** 3
Shocking score
- **NEW RIDER** 8
Oh so simple!
- **DESIRABILITY** 7
Chicks dig saving the planet!



Verdict

6/10

An admirable effort from Harley, what a production model will look like remains to be seen...

- SPEED, COMPONENTS, BACK-UP
- 18-INCH FRONT, RANGE, PRICE



ARE FRIENDS ELECTRIC?

Progress is being made on the battery powered front, with the US a hot bed for technological advances. So where do we stand on the electric bike front? There are a number of manufacturers at it, but the steps that were being made were slowed by the worldwide recession. Things appear to have picked up now, and there's a mix of established players and bespoke builders offering a range of machinery – albeit at significant costs. So here's a round up of where many of the makers are at, and an insight as to where we are with regard to these bikes becoming mainstream.

KTM

The Austrian firm is concentrating on smaller sized machines for its electric future, sensing a demand for urban-type bikes (including a sexy scooter) as well as offering an alternative to noisy off-landers. The Freeride series are now commercially available, albeit for five figure sums, but KTM has seen sense and offered try-outs in its E-Ride parks.



YAMAHA

Yamaha hasn't gone balls out with fancy top end stuff here, rather ticked the 'it's on our radar' box with some functional machinery. The minimally designed PES1 and PED1 (Passion Electric Street/Dirt) that were claimed to be hitting the shops in 2016 – back in 2013 – haven't been referred to much. Light weight is the key here, with the Street hoped to be just 100kg, and the dirt 15kg lighter.

HONDA

Most manufacturers have been making noises about battery powered bikes, but back in 2011 Honda went one step further and revealed the RC-E. This had massive potential, it being pretty for a start, 250cc sized for another. But since the unveiling at the Tokyo show not much more has been said by Honda, preferring to let Mugen do the hard yakka.



MUGEN

Last year's TT Zero winning Shinden machine from Japanese manufacturer Mugen (a long standing partner of Honda, and founded by Soichiro Honda's son) has had another 10kW of power (now 110kW or 147bhp) added to its Mission Motors unit that's come from better battery cooling abilities. Changes to the fairing design have also aided aerodynamics. The bike still weighs 250 kilos and is a competition only machine, so, sadly, it's not for sale...



MOTOCZYSZ

Having tried, and failed, to build a MotoGP bike (well, it was built, it just wasn't competitive), casino designer Michael Czysz turned his attentions to battery powered bikes. It was a good move, too, with MotoCzysz taking the Zero TT crown four times on the E1pc machine before Mugen's recent dominance. This was turning out to be a classic battle forming, but a cancer diagnosis for Czysz robbed this emerging sport of that. Czysz's cancer is a rare and untreatable one, and when the sad day comes it will have robbed this emerging sport of a true maverick.



MISSION

Founded in 2007, Mission is on a mission, producing two models of sportsbike, the 160bhp Mission R and RS that are made from quality components from the likes of Öhlins, Brembo and BST. These bikes offer what Mission terms as a 'real world' range of 140 miles. The company worked closely with Harley-Davidson on the LiveWire project, and has also dealt with the likes of Mugen on its Shinden race machines.



ZERO

Zero is pretty well established in the electric motorcycle world, having established itself in 2006. Starting off with dirt bikes, the firm has moved to street bikes, with development moving apace and a dealer network established in the States. Up until Harley's involvement and Polaris buying Mission, Zero was the biggest electric bike manufacturer in the world, building 1,300 machines last year. Power packs have improved and increased over time, with the most powerful bike, the SR, offering 67bhp and a whopping 144Nm of torque – all for \$18,140. Speed stats are stated as a 3.3 second 0-100kph time and is able to hit over 100mph. Range is said to be nearly 300km in city mode. And worries about the batteries are allayed with the power packs warrantied for 100,000 miles.



BRAMMO

Brammo was one of the big names in electric motorcycles, but when Polaris came along earlier this year and upped its stake in the company to buy it out completely, things changed. That's why we're seeing a Victory branded bike at the TT this year, as well as production of Brammo's former machines moving to its Iowa facility. The TT bike is essentially the Brammo Empulse RR, powered by a Parker GVM PMAC motor. Brammo had been closest to proper production with the Empulse range, and the takeover may provide the impetus needed to become a genuine game changer. Brammo still exists, but the brand itself is now focused on selling powertrain solutions to others.



ENERGICA

Modena-based Energica has developed a range of machines, with the new Ego the top of the range sportsbike. The Ego develops 136bhp and 195Nm of power, enough for it to hit 60mph in three seconds and hit 150mph flat out. The firm reckons it's on par with a supersport bike. The Ego uses straight cut final drive gears. The 11.7 kWh battery is good for 1,200 recharge cycles, with a full charge taking 3.5 hours – or an 85 per cent DC charge taking just 30 minutes. At 258kg, it's a porker in terms of current bikes, but not far away in its class of electric friends. Range is reckoned to be 150km at and 80kph average. This falls to 50km at 100kph. Prices are around €25,000, which isn't outrageous...

LIGHTNING

The mantle of the world's fastest electric motorcycle belongs to Lightning with its LS-218 machine. This near \$40,000 bike is packed full of world-leading technology and looks absolutely stupendous. The 218 in the name refers to its top speed, 218. Not kph, but mph, a sensational feat set during Bonneville Speedweek last year – the cost of that run being just eight cents! The bike also won at Pikes Peak. Not in an electric class, but the whole shebang! Range-wise, we're looking at around 100 miles at highway speeds. When you factor in the Marchesini wheels, Brembo braking paraphernalia, Öhlins FGRT forks and TTX36 suspension then that price tag starts to look more than reasonable. A range of battery packs are available, from 12 to 20kWh.





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STRIPPED

With Suzuki finally deciding to pay up and enter the strip club with the new GSX-S1000, we got a venue sorted and went for a boogie with some of its rivals...

WORDS: ROOTSY PICS: JONNY GAWLER



RIPPED



When it comes to building a new naked bike, there's a difficult path to tread. Make it too sporty and many won't see the point in one when they could just plump for the faired machine. KTM and Aprilia could be accused of falling into that trap with the 1290 Super Duke R and Tuono V4R; both stunning bikes, but not the sales success they'd hoped they would be.

On the flipside, you've got to make a naked stand out against a growing crowd. Most Japanese brands have failed in this regard, building bikes too bland to be chosen against a raft of interesting and relevant European machines.

There's no better example of this than Suzuki, who produced what many thought should have been the epitome of a naked bike in the form of the GSR600 and 750. 'Naked Gixxers!' is what we all

thought, but what we actually got from the Hamamatsu factory was the motorcycling equivalent of a margarine sandwich. So when we heard that a naked Gixxer 1000 was on the cards, you will have forgiven us for not doing cartwheels in celebration. We then saw the first pictures of it and weren't really bowled over. Next up we sat on one at Motorcycle Live and still found nothing to write home about.

But then we got to ride it. The launch was held on some cracking roads in Spain in iffy conditions and the new GSX-S was almost that mythical machine we so desired – a naked GSX-R1000K5. Once you've got an idea of a bike in your head, it's hard to shed that impression, but that's exactly what it did to my noggin, and that's exactly why we've assembled these other bikes to test it against.

The Suzuki's natural enemy is the Kawasaki Z1000 – nutty in both design and execution. Prices are pretty similar, too, so the GSX-S will be gunning for the Zed. The Triumph Speed Triple is always a consideration in this market, even given its long in the tooth status. The inline triple motor is your go-to engine for friendly and fruity power, and contrasts against the revvy nature of the inline fours. But the biggest dynamic test will be against the BMW S 1000 R, especially as the firm gave us a fully loaded Sport version. The Beemer is infamously powered by a motor inspired by the K5 GSX-R1000, but that's where the similarities end.

With the West as our playground, Llandow's circuit being the zip slide that everyone wants a go on, we set about seeing whether this bitsa Gixxer has got what it takes against the opposition. 🏁

The Triumph has
come to party!



REAL DEAL

Triumph's Tristar scheme offers plenty of options, but the APR works out at 9.9 per cent. For £2k down, you can pay £119 a month with a £5,400 final payment.

Triumph Speed Triple

There was a time when no other bike need turn up if the Speed Triple was out on the prowl. That raucous motor, iconic looks and butch performance all ensured that the Triumph was the only ticket in town. But seeing off Bandits, Hornets and Fazers was the easy bit – it's the modern European mounts that the British bike has so much trouble with these days, on top of a resurgent Japan and its tasty new offerings.

That's what happens if you rest on your laurels for a little too long – others come along and whip them from you, leaving you fidgeting on your arse looking for the Preparation H. Triumph rightly got comfortable after the 2011 overhaul, and was positively recumbent after the R was released the following year.

That's all figuratively speaking, of course, but once on board the good ship Triumph you'll also find yourself cosseted in fine style, not least on that cushion of a seat. It's a comfortable riding position, the bars and pegs are all set nicely and the bike's quality is palpable as it oozes through your pores – and ears once you fire it

up the rumbling inline triple.

Disposed rulers go one of two ways – they either get wiped out (in biking terms by a new model) or fade away, and it's the latter that's happening to the Speed. It's all being done in a dignified manner, but compared to the Axis power bikes on test here the Triumph always seems a step behind its rivals. Underseat exhausts are so last decade, single-sided swingarms all a bit passé and sub-130bhp just that little bit meh in the context of superbike-engined naked. That squashed, squat look no longer defines the class, and no more does it have the look of a contemporary machine about it.

It's still a bloody good bike, mind, and is a machine that smears a smile all over your face. Under sunny skies and on decent West Country roads, plotting a course between flowering rape seed oil fields on one side and juvenile corn plots on the other is joy personified, with the Triumph eagerly thundering between exit and entry points. On track, you settle into a rhythm so easily, and it's a machine that'll do a tank of fuel before you know it, leaving

you fresh and able to concentrate on getting the most out of the chassis, suspension and tyres.

You'd initially say that it has a good spread of power, typical of a triple, but even on the road you quickly yearn for another thousand revs, especially as the Speed gets a bit wheezy approaching the redline. It's a meaty midrange alright, but the substance beyond that is in short supply. At the end of the day, if you're not one to punish the rev limiter the Speed should suit – especially with its sublime fuel injection and impeccable manners. These make the Triumph the easiest to control

here, and the notion of adding traction control to this bike is alien, especially with the grip the Metzeler Racetecs offer. There are times where the Trumpet feels heavy, but never cumbersome thanks to the refinement of the power delivery.

We've always said that the standard bike is better than the Öhlins shod R version, and we still stand by that. The Showa suspension, both front and rear, is undeniably set on the soft-side, but this suits the bike better than the super stiff Swedish stuff, both on road and any track that isn't billiard table smooth. The Triumph maintains accuracy until



A classic configuration

TRIUMPH SPEED TRIPLE ABS £9,749



ENGINE

The 1,050cc inline triple's guises have repaid Triumph's investment handsomely. The motor didn't get much attention in the 2011 changes, with more focus on the chassis. Revisions to the lump included inter cylinder breathing improvements via an increase in the transfer holes from 30mm to 38mm to reduce pumping losses. The airbox was made 10 per cent larger and the cooling improved with a new radiator core. It's the only bike here with underseat pipes – a sign of the times.

CHASSIS

Back in 2011 Triumph treated the speed Speed to an all new chassis, placing the engine in it 3mm further forward and canting it seven degrees in the same plane. Weight distribution was accordingly changed to 50.9 per cent forwards. The seat was made 5mm lower, bars are 26mm closer to the rider, while the front axle to pivot length is reduced by 44mm. Showa provide the suspension at both ends with Nissin calipers doing the stopping. Metzeler Racetecs offer grip galore.

Highlights

- Fruity triple motor
- Iconic looks
- Showa suspension
- ABS as standard
- 214kg (wet)
- 127bhp

TRACK 7

More than capable

FAST ROAD 8

Loves it off the leash

HOOLIGAN 8

A job at heart

NEW RIDER 4

Stick to the street

DESIRABILITY 6

Not any more...

How retro!



Soft suits the Speed



BENJAMIN'S OPINION



I wasn't expecting much from the old girl in this test. But having had Speed Triples as longterm bikes on a couple of occasions, I have a soft spot for them. It did far better than I had guessed, however. It felt nice and handy on track and, of course, is one of the greatest wheelie bikes on the planet. But it does lag behind the competition now. That engine, while it defines the bike, is also like an anchor around its neck. The time has come to fully redesign it into something new that doesn't weigh quite so much. Power is already fine, the bike just needs to shed at least 20 kilos to be right back in there, so losing it off the lump makes sense as everything else is spot on.

BJ's Verdict 7/10

Verdict 7/10

Being British it'll scrap to the end, but Triumph has to face up to the competition...

- CHARACTER, COMPOSURE, ERGONOMICS
- WEIGHT, STYLE, PEAK POWER

It'll do this all day



Wot no wheelie!



you're on a banzai mission, and it all works in unison with the chassis and motor to offer a brilliantly balanced package. We've moaned in the past about the ABS set-up (not the Brembo brakes themselves), with the system chiming in too soon, even on the road, but even over Llandow's bumpy braking zones, the system was nigh-on imperceptible. This is progress.

If only we didn't have to jump on the other bikes. If only the competition kept quiet. If only we hadn't repealed the Corn Laws. Then the Speed Triple would be the hit that it's always been. Until a new one is released the Triumph's battle against its rivals may be forlorn fight...

The Zed hides its weight well, like white leathers!



Bow to your sensei!



It's almost a sculpture...

Kawasaki Z1000

If there were points for going out on a limb and creating some sort of Judge Dredd crossed with a manga-styled naked machine, then Kawasaki would scoop the lot. And guess what? There are points for such design – we're going to award it an extra one in its final tot-up! What a bike looks like is crucial, and over the last decade Kawasaki's avant-garde approach to its motorcycles has won over

many fans. True, it's alienated a few more, but we subscribe to the school of regretting the things you don't do, rather than the stuff you do.

So it's interesting, we'll give it that. The low, truffle snuffling snout is the most perplexing element of the bike's design, but other touches are fantastic, with this press bike topped off with the Akrapovic titanium cans (a £1,200 investment to ditch the four outlet standard exhausts).

The blend of fun, aggression and practicality is all there in the right amount, hence you're not surprised when presented with the miniscule dash once you nestle yourself on board. With no electronics to fiddle with, why would you need anything bigger? Oh yeah, to fit a gear indicator, that's why. Having said that, the two-directional tachometer is a bit of a faff to read. Initial inputs to 3,000rpm are stacked vertically, with the rest of the range presented horizontally. There is such a thing as over-design...

There's no such thing as being

over-powered, though, and the Z1000 is packed full of the stuff, all easily and willingly accessed, mocking its paltry 122bhp figure. In first gear the fuel injection and urgency of the engine is all a bit too much, and faffy mini-roundabouts and junctions are all a bit awkward, engine and throttle-wise. But get the party bus revving harder and these imperfections melt away, leaving you with a motor with real intent in the midrange. It's one of those motors that's happy to tootle around in top all day, but if you start tapping away at the 'box the Zed's propulsion more than matches the Triumph's. Like the Speed Triple, it runs out of revs at the top end, but at least the inline four inherently owns more of them to play with.

However, trying to keep the BMW's reg plate focused with my worsening short-sightedness was mission impossible. You think the Kawasaki's fast, and it is, but the German bike is in a different league. With no traction control, no ABS and only Dunlop D214



A laid back shock...



What an ace face!

BENJAMIN'S OPINION



I've always felt that technically I shouldn't like the Z1000. It's so heavy for a performance naked in 2015, doesn't make that much power (relatively speaking), and has no toys to coo over. But despite all of this, I really enjoy them. The way it makes its power always surprises, as does how it shifts its elephant-esque mass with alarming rapidity. She's no track hack, her big belly swings itself around a lot on swift changes of direction, but it's brilliant on the road. I did a silly race on one in winter last year on greasy Welsh roads and it was composure personified. I also love the looks, but like the Triumph, I hope any future version fits into a smaller bikini next time around...

BJ's Verdict **7/10**

KAWASAKI Z1000 **£9,499**



ENGINE

The 1,043cc inline four engine is very similar to the previous model, but with a few tweaks for better performance and improved economy. New oval sub-throttles help to keep the engine slim(ish), throttle bore remains at 38mm and a new secondary set of ECU actuated throttle valves aids a linear response by regulating airflow better. Intake funnels are now split by length; two short, two long. Cam timing has also been revised. There is no traction control.

CHASSIS

It's the running gear that got the most changes in 2013, although the five piece cast aluminium frame is similar to before – going over the engine for a slimmer waist. Mass centralisation is also in evidence, with the exhaust and rear suspension redesigned to achieve better balance. The 41mm Showa BPF is a quality unit, reducing internal pressure but improving on its damping force. Brakes are Kawasaki branded radial jobs with petal discs and ABS is an option.

Highlights

- Wacky looks
- Earthy 1,043cc motor
- Showa suspension
- Petal discs
- 220kg (kerb)
- 122bhp

TRACK **6**

More decking than B&Q

FAST ROAD **7**

Happier in the hills

HOOLIGAN **8**

Nothing holds it back

NEW RIDER **4**

The 800 for you

DESIRABILITY **8**

Marmite looks

The eyes have it...

“YOU REVERT BACK TO MUCKING ABOUT ON THE Z1000 – WHICH IT DOES AWESOMELY!”

rubber to keep it in the hunt, the Kawasaki simply has no chance, so you let it go and revert to mucking about – which it does awesomely.

It feels like it's a low bike when you first get on it, and this manifests itself when you deck the bike out when turning right at a roundabout. It's a nice marker to have, and the Dunlops work well enough to reach this point, but the front hoop needs heat in it before it offers much in the way of confidence. It's also an easy bike to easy to hang off, so you can go about making shapes on board knowing there's going to be loads of warning before anything wayward happens.

The suspension is marshmallow soft, which works well on the road where the bike feels most at home, but on track this meant the Zed would only feel settled in longer turns. On the

brakes into the bumpy first turn, the bike rattled the mirror loose while farting about for pictures, and there

was no consistency in the way the bike would back in, but this was all part of the show. If you want a focussed track assassin, get a Tuono. Shits and giggles? This is your weapon of choice.

With price in the Zed's favour, it's a tough call between it and its latest Nippon chum. What the Kawasaki loses in dynamic ability it regains in character and spirit. Given its more humble origins, the fact it's even an option is to the Kawasaki's credit.

REAL DEAL

The Kawasaki Calculator gives us the following option. A £2,000 deposit then 37 months at £243 and then it's yours. It works out at 9.5 per cent APR.

Verdict **8/10**

Wacky styling and packed full of character; the Zed is not to be overlooked...

- + LOOKS, COMFORT, LAZY PERFORMANCE
- LOOKS, WEIGHT, TOY-LITE

Suzuki GSX-S1000

How long have we been waiting for a naked GSX-R1000, especially one powered by the almighty K5 powerplant? Too damned long, that's the answer, but now it's here and in the flash it's absolutely... er, OK.

It's fair to say that the naked Gixxer isn't the all singing and all dancing second coming that we'd hoped it would be, but the fact that it's here should be rejoiced in its own right. Suzuki's decade long struggle appears to be nearing its end, and we should be grateful for small mercies.

The motor has been the focus of most attention, what with its lineage to the K5 bike, and it's a belter of a block. We stuck it on the JHS Racing dyno and it lives with its racy brother all the way

to 10k, matching it for torque (albeit with a few more dips thanks to recent emissions legislation). This is the real deal then; pumping out 140bhp, blessed with traction control and owning ancillaries off later incarnations of the GSX-R range.

It looks good, feels right, and just seems more focused compared to the two bikes I've just hopped off. But like the Zed, there's an awkwardness to the fuel injection at low speeds. It's the fuelling being over eager, and no matter how precise your input, there's a lurch that can catch you out – especially on a cold Dunny.

But the addition of more revs transforms the bike. Once you're in the midrange you can sense the GSX-S wanting to be taken off the leash, and by 7,000rpm away

it shoots, buzzing brilliantly for the next 3,000rpm before things flatten off in five figure territory.

Instead of barking after a bone, the GSX-S is more interested in corners. The bike feels very balanced, much more compact than the Kawasaki and Triumph, and poised for whatever awaits. Slow speed manoeuvring is easily executed thanks to the balance (and no thanks to the FI), but as speeds increase the limitations of the front tyre become evident.

The rear Dunlop is soaking up the 140bhp output well, but the natural stance of a naked means the front hoop has to do much of the work. The Kawasaki easily found the peg, offering the reference point that otherwise the tyres should, but the better ground clearance on the Suzuki means



Classy components...

putting more faith in the rubber.

The suspension is set on the soft side, but this feels right, even on track where the more compact dimensions and ergonomics enable you to better feel the feedback. Those long hero blobs eventually get a pummelling, but it's not on lap two like on the Kawasaki. The lack of a steering damper made itself known a few times, with the power of the GSX-S unweighting the front enough for it to kick off any undulations. The narrow feeling bars transfer these shudders quickly before



“IT LOOKS GOOD, FEELS RIGHT AND SEEMS MORE FOCUSED THAN THE TWO BIKES I’VE JUST HOPPED OFF...”

Nowt wrong in the dynamic department...



Welcome back, old friend...

SUZUKI GSX-S1000 £8,999



ENGINE

Suzuki engineers settled on the K5 version of powerplant for a variety of reasons. The long stroke design better fits low to midrange characteristics, while the crankshaft and gearbox layout has advantages with the chassis design. The compact combustion chamber is home to a new piston design (3 per cent lighter) and a lower compression ratio. Cam profile is the biggest change to the S, with a less aggressive angle widening power and lowering the rev limit. It gets a TC system.

CHASSIS

The new frame is lighter than the current GSX-R1000 frame, while the aluminium swingarm uses the Gixxer's as its inspiration. KYB provide the suspension at both ends, although there's no compression adjustment at either end. Seat height is low, at 815mm, while steering geometry has been relaxed for less hardcore riders. The Brembo radial brake calipers are off the GSX-R1000 and bite on 310mm discs, the ABS version uses a Bosch system. This bike was fitted with D214 rubber.

Highlights

- K5 naked Gixxer!
- Brand new chassis
- Brembo stoppers
- Traction control!
- 209kg (kerb)
- 139bhp

TRACK

Needs stickier tyres

FAST ROAD

Get it above 7k

HOOLIGAN

Turn off the tracery

NEW RIDER

Why would you?

DESIRABILITY

Neutral looks...

8

8

8

5

7

getting on with the show, but this would be an upgrade I'd be interested in from the start.

Braking (by Brembo) is brilliant, but this gets molested by the ABS system that cuts in over rumble strips while approaching roundabouts hard, which is mildly disconcerting. It's the sort of thing that would have been ironed out if this was a second generation GSX-S, but in its first incarnation it's not as refined as elsewhere – as demonstrated by our next gripe.

What's everyone's first contact

with a bike? The key, that's what, and the GSX-S's key looks like its come from the 1970s, light years away from the crafted keys of the Kawasaki and BMW. When presented with this by your dealer, you'd swear they'd given you the keys from a GS550, not this naked shit kicker.

But £8,999 is not to be sniffed at, and the corners cut by Suzuki are represented in the price. It's thoroughly competent, a bit on the bland side, but it's got plenty of potential to rival those in the upper echelons of the class.

Warm everything up, including the rider, and the GSX-S sings along



REAL DEAL

Price is likely to go up soon. Current offers are at 8.9 per cent. £2,179 down, 36 payments of £108 then a final £4,664 payment. Bingo!



BENJAMIN'S OPINION



Great bike. Really, honestly and truthfully a great bike this. But like one or two other new Suzukis of late it suffers from the same syndrome – it's really likeable, but perhaps not lovable. You could eventually fall for it, especially with a wee bit of personalisation. It also made me realise just how far bikes have come after seeing its dyno curve match a K5 GSX-R's perfectly. Yes, it's quick, but not hugely so – even if it does wheelie like a tit with the TC switched off. Having said that, I did enjoy all my time on the Suzuki, and only when riding the BMW did I remember its place in the pecking order. At that price though? Well, at that figure it's probably the sports bargain of the year!

BJ's Verdict

8/10

Verdict 8/10

Plenty of boxes are ticked, but does it pump enough blood about?

- + PRICE, MOTOR, CHASSIS
- LOOKS, TYRES, AMBITION



Fairings or no fairings, the S 1000 range delivers the same results...

BMW S 1000 R

Turning up to a big naked sports test with what is essentially a naked S 1000 RR is like turning up to a fist fight with a shotgun. OK, so the top line figures may be shared by all – 1,000cc (ish) multi inline engines, but the BMW S 1000 R is so far ahead of the competition that any comparison is meaningless – or is it?

BMW has certainly stacked the odds in its favour. This press bike was the Sport version, equipped with Dynamic Damping Control suspension, Dynamic Traction Control, Riding Mode Pro, quickshifter, heated grips, LED indicators, Akrapovic can, HP rearsets and levers. That shotgun has just been loaded with a magazine of dum dums...

But this machine could be the bog stocker, the one no-one buys, bereft of the fancy suspension and fitted just with ASC traction control and it would still be wiping the floor with the competition here. And that's

because it's a milder version of the RR, the bike that stuck its middle finger up to the rules. And in many ways, the subtle detune from superbike to naked roadster makes it a better machine on the street – less angry, less scary and more encompassing.

Power-wise, it smokes it. Nigh on 150bhp is a stunning figure, and while throttle delivery is in your face, it's never frighteningly wayward. It drives nicely from nothing, and though not as creamy at the very bottom as the Triumph and the Kawasaki, it's still able to do the dutiful stuff without getting you all in a tix.

But you're not buying an S 1000 R for the dull stuff, you're getting one to be 100 per cent entertained, and that's exactly what the R does with the throttle wide open. You instantly know it's derived from the RR, and the DNA profile is like looking at two brothers. With a gazillion different engine and suspension settings to choose from, it's only

natural to start soft and safe, but even with its angelic face on, the BMW is more than capable of being a very bad boy indeed.

Both the BMW and the Suzuki have motors derived from the K5 GSX-R1000, but it's the German lump that is by far the more potent. It's crisp and direct, while

there's a softer side to the GSX-S's character – which may suit more people. It takes a while for the Suzuki to truly get into its stride, but the BMW needs no introductory period – it heads straight to the redline from the off.

It's brilliant on the road; sensationally fast and with the



BMW S 1000 R SPORT £11,600



ENGINE

The motor of the S 1000 RR has been tamed to a mere 150bhp at the rear wheel. The cylinder head ducts have been redesigned and the valve lift adjusted to plump the midrange. The rev limiter has been dropped to 12,500rpm, that's what all accounts for the power drop. Helping the retune is the BMW-X engine management system that allows the R to use 100 per cent ride-by-wire to allow the rider aids to function. It also uses the cylinder selective anti-knock control.

CHASSIS

The chassis is based on the RR's ally perimeter frame, but the rake has been increased by 0.8 degrees to make the trail figure 5mm longer than the RR. Wheelbase is upped by 22mm, giving the R a less aggressive stance and more stability. Kerb weight is 207kg. 46mm Sachs forks and a Sachs shock are DDC controlled, though this semi-active system is not included in the stock bike's price. Wheels are 10-spoke alloys and roll on Pirelli Rosso Corsa rubber.

Highlights

- RR powerplant
- RR bling bits
- RR suspension
- RR traction control
- 207kg (kerb)
- 148bhp

TRACK

Phenomenal skills

FAST ROAD

Will your neck survive?

HOOLIGAN

Turn the aids off

NEW RIDER

Book into A&E

DESIRABILITY

Actions speak louder...

9

9

7

2

7

Fab front end...



Snap, crackle, pop!

BENJAMIN'S OPINION



By Jove, this BMW ruled this test with ridiculous ease. Only when you ride it after the others do you realise how much faster, more sophisticated and more modern it is. The S 1000 R really belongs in a higher category inhabited by things like Aprilia's Tuono and KTM's 1290 Super Duke R. Here, it sits upon its throne and laughs at the try hards. Yes, this particular bike was festooned with most of BMW's accessory range, and has a lot more technology than all three of the others put together. But even in completely stock trim, it would still walk this test. The only reason I minus it a point is the price, especially when specced up to the ying yang.

BJ's Verdict

9/10

“ THE BMW NEEDS NO INTRODUCTORY PERIOD – IT HEADS STRAIGHT TO THE REDLINE FROM THE OFF... ”

snap, crackle and pop on the overrun only encouraging you more. It's cramped on board, able to be adjusted with the aftermarket stuff on, but this is the most jockey-like I've felt all day. It's not a natural feeling to begin with, but once you transfer to the track it makes perfect sense. Your feet are high, you clamber over the top of the tank and get yourself ready for a session of sensational stuff.

The semi-active DDC works a treat, and the differences between settings are stark. You'll naturally stick it on Hard for the track, but when things get as bumpy as they do round Llandow it's worth admitting defeat and opting for Normal, just to take the edge off the jarring – knock it down to Soft on the road too. With the riding mode in Dynamic Pro, you get the full hit of the machine, with the TC barely intervening,

showing how capable the Pirelli Rosso Corsa rubber is. It spits out black lines from apex to exit, always giving consummate drive and it leaves you wondering if it's worth lusting after an RR. Being a hero shouldn't be this easy. With the chassis, suspension and brakes largely untouched from the TT-winning bike, and with the motor touched, but in the right way (no, not there), you've just got to ask yourself if you can live with the riding position – and that depends on how often you visit speeds above 100mph. Don't worry, we won't tell...

REAL DEAL

With a deposit of around £1,850, BMW then wants 36 payments of £179 and a final one of £5K. APR is 8.9 per cent

Verdict 9/10

It's like jumping on a thoroughbred after a being in a donkey derby...

- MOTOR, ELECTRONICS, CHASSIS
- LOOKS, EXTRAS, PRICE



The Beemer can be cajoled into party antics...

POWER AND TORQUE



TECH DATA

Triumph Speed Triple

Kawasaki Z1000

Suzuki GSX-S1000



ENGINE	Type	1,050cc, l/c, 12v, DOHC, inline triple	1,043cc, l/c, 16v, DOHC, inline four	999cc, l/c, 16v, DOHC, inline four
	Bore x Stroke	79 x 71.4mm	77 x 56mm	73.4 x 59mm
	Compression	12.0:1	11.8:1	12.2:1
	Fuelling	EFI, 46mm throttle bodies	EFI, 38mm throttle bodies	EFI, 44mm throttle bodies
	Claimed Power	127bhp @ 9,400rpm	122bhp @ 10,500rpm	139.2bhp @ 11,500rpm
CHASSIS	Claimed Torque	106Nm @ 7,750rpm	99Nm @ 7,500rpm	98.5Nm @ 9,500rpm
	Frame	Aluminium twin spar	Twin spar aluminium	Aluminium twin spar
	F Suspension	43mm Showa forks, fully adj.	41mm Showa SFF-BP fork, fully adj.	43mm KYB forks, preload and rebound adj.
	R Suspension	Showa monoshock, fully adj.	Showa shock, preload and rebound adj.	KYB shock, preload and rebound adj.
	Front Brakes	Four piston radial caliper, 320mm discs, ABS	Four piston radial calipers, 310mm discs	Four piston Brembo monoblocks, 310mm discs, ABS
DIMENSIONS	Rear Brakes	Two piston caliper, 255mm disc, ABS	Single piston caliper, 250mm disc	Twin piston caliper, 240mm disc, ABS
	Wheelbase	1,435mm	1,435mm	1,460mm
	Seat Height	825mm	815mm	815mm
	Kerb Weight	214kg	221kg	209kg
	Fuel Capacity	17.5 litres	17 litres	17 litres
PRICE	Price	£9,749	£9,499 (ABS £9,899)	£9,499 (non ABS £8,999)
	From	Triumph UK www.triumph.co.uk	Kawasaki UK www.kawasaki.co.uk	Suzuki UK www.suzuki-gb.co.uk

Conclusion

Last year was supposed to be the year of the naked, what with BMW and KTM bringing out two mind blowing bangers, but 2015 is turning out to be a special year, too. The Suzuki GSX-S is a welcome addition to the party, while we can't wait to get our hands on the revised Aprilia Tuono to see if the Italians have turned the loopiness up to 11.

And that's the point, isn't it? New bikes drive more sales, and while we realise that manufacturers can't go pumping out fresh bikes like fresh bread, there is a correlation between the newness of a machine and its sales. And that's why we're hoping that Triumph comes up with something pretty special with the new Speed Triple. The one we've got here is still a great bike, we're not saying it isn't, but look at what's come out since its last revision in 2011. Triumph isn't a company that wants to make up the numbers, but with so many more viable options than were around four years ago we don't blame you if your eyes wander beyond your

local Triumph dealer. And don't think the Speed Triple R is the stop gap, because it isn't unless you live on The Circuit of the Americas, or somewhere equally as smooth – Micheal Bublé's larynx? No, the standard stuff works well on the Triumph because it was built to be a roadster, not a racer.

That said, if you've got a Triumph there's not enough on offer from Japan to make the hit of depreciation worth it. Keep the Speed because it's still relevant and a riot to ride. That's not to say that the Japanese bikes aren't, but there's not enough enticing us away from a Trumpet that's already tucked up cosy inside the garage.

If you're new to the naked game, then that's a different matter. The two Japanese bikes are worth an ogle, but they go about things in different ways – the Kawasaki being full of frolics while the Suzuki is more focused. Ultimately, the new Suzuki is the better bike, but the Kawasaki has bags of character that makes up for its lack of athleticism.



You won't beat the Beemer, but at least you'll have fun trying...

BMW 1000 R Sport



999cc, I/c, 16v, DOHC, inline four
80 x 49.7mm
12.0:1
EFI, 48mm throttle bodies
148bhp @ 11,500rpm
106Nm @ 9,000rpm

Aluminium composite spar
46mm Sachs forks, DDC adj
Sachs shock, DDC adj.
Four piston Brembo calipers, 320mm discs, ABS
Single caliper piston, 220mm, ABS

1,439mm
814mm
207kg
17.5 litres

£11,600 (std £10,200)
BMW Motorrad UK
www.bmw-motorrad.co.uk

The queue to the strip club...



■ We're never quite sure where the Kawasaki packs its weight, as on the hoof they handle easily, but the extra pounds do hamper acceleration – unless you're going in an upward plane where the big Zed thrives. Given the fact it hasn't got a superbike chassis, a dumbed down 200bhp motor or the top shelf extras, it's a credit to Kawasaki that the Z1000 performs as well as it does. Style-wise, it offers the full package, and life on the road will mask some of its sporting deficiencies. It seems decent value, too, but then you throw in the GSX-S's standard equipment (traction control) and the gulf in price widens.

Which makes the Suzuki look like the bargain it is. You get what you pay for in life, and for the knock down price of nine grand you're getting a brilliant motor, capable chassis, apt ancillaries and acceptable looks. The latter is

the bike's weak point as any naked needs to arrest the eye, but in this case our pupils kept looking elsewhere.

The GSX-S is not a naked Gixxer in the way the S 1000 R is a naked RR, and that suits the bike and class better. It gives the GSX-S more flexibility and a wider appeal. Not everyone is wanting peg scraping ability from a naked roadster, preferring to do that on a faired bike, so Suzuki's conception is right, it's just that the execution is a little muted.


But there's nothing muted about our winner – the BMW S 1000 R. We can see past BMW's extra inclusions on this test bike and still easily pronounce it the best of this bunch. Up against other Europeans is another matter, but here it offers all the performance you could ever need. The electronics ensemble is the future, now; the chassis is



The traditional victory celebration...

unadulteratedly able; and that motor makes a mockery of some missiles it's that potent.

It may not rock classic looks, be the easiest to ride in town or tug at your heartstrings in the

way the Triumph and Kawasaki can, but there's no way in the world those bikes can make the shapes, lean angles and speed of the BMW. And at the end of the day, that's what it's all about. 

“THE BMW'S MOTOR MAKES A MOCKERY OF SOME MISSILES IT'S THAT POTENT...”



44



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This finance offer is at a rate better than high street lenders.

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Can I Play With MADNESS

The new Kawasaki H2 hits the streets for the first time, but is the big blower a load of hot air?

WORDS: ROOTSY PICS: JONNY GAWLER

“What the fuck is that?” I didn’t have to be the world’s greatest lip reader to work out what was being asked by a bloke in town to his girlfriend before walking past, slack jawed and gawping at his own reflection in the mirrored and menacing presence of the Kawasaki H2. He wasn’t the only one to fall into the H2’s beguiling trap down the high street, and the H2 was being stared and pointed at by all manner of people wherever I went on this 200bhp freak show.

I caught a chap at a garage looking at the bike intently, wondering how they went about the aftermarket paint job (it’s not). A bloke on his way to a bike meet on a ratty old Katana pored over every detail before asking for a picture with him sat on it. I was constantly being waved and flashed at (for varyingly different reasons) for the first time in ages.

But the most disturbing encounter was with a copper on a bike. It turns out he’d been marshalling on the Ride of Respect, and was finally making his way home on the Sunday evening. He’d seen the bike as I was traversing across a roundabout through a now quiet Wiltshire town, and made a B-line for me. He scared the crap out of me as I caught sight of his blue flashing lights hunting me down, as I knew only too well what I’d been up to just minutes before...

I was severely regretting opening the taps on the H2 down the A4, but was resigned to my fate as he paced up to the bike, flipping up his lid to reveal a smiling, inquisitive, child-like face. Hang about... “Wow, that’s one of those new H2’s, isn’t it,” he asked, before regaling me with every minute detail about the bike. It turns out he’d been up to Motorcycle Live having heard that Kawasaki was starting the bike up on a daily basis, and was firmly ensconced on the ‘love it’ side of the H2’s Marmite debate. We tried to out nerd each other for the next ten minutes, with me playing the upper hand having gone on the launch, before jumping back on his BMW with a spring in his step and no doubt making supercharger noises on his police issue BMW all the way home. He left a happy man. But not as happy as me...

Why happy? Because I’d got away with it, again. I’d spent the last three days getting away with it, letting the supercharged H2 do what it does with me powerless to resist. There used to be a time when this is what I

did all day, every day, but increasingly sophisticated police methods and draconian penalties for getting caught have tempered my regular riding. But when presented with the spectre of speed at your disposal for a few precious days you have no choice but to revert back to type; you simply have to exploit the H2’s incredible potential.

To be honest, I wasn’t really looking forward to riding the H2 at home. Having been on the launch, I’d had the best H2 experience ever available – a deserted Qatar track, slick tyres and warm weather was never going to be beaten by dodging April’s delayed showers during a cool May on the bumpy B-





*It's fair to say that
the Queen's Highways
have never seen the like...*



This is what 200bhp on the roads looks like...



roads of Britain. At Qatar I'd experienced a bike that was committed, for the committed, and suggested then that the H2 stay in that environment for humanity's sake. But Kawasaki has made the H2 into a road-going production machine, intending it to be experienced on the road; all 200bhp of it.

My first few miles out of the office probably used a tenth of the bike's ultimate potential, and I was more than surprised to find the bike perfectly usable. I had knocked it back a few times at Qatar, but with so few reference points, knocking it back still equated to chokey back home on the roads. But this was, how shall I put this, all very normal.

Yes, the H2 feels thoroughly respectable at legal speeds, with it able to traverse through town at 30mph or so without throwing a wobbly or spitting out its various chirps or whistles from the 'charger. It feels like an inline four with the fuel injection of something like a K3 Suzuki GSX-R1000 – direct, but liveable. Though the ergonomics splay your legs out wide, like pre-2015 R1s, it's a surprise just how conventional everything is. It's not burbling away at the lights, it's not bunny-hopping from junctions, in fact, it's not straining at the leash anywhere. Bar for the indicator button being two millimetres too high (honestly, you'll notice), and a slight resistance to hold a constant throttle, you'd have no idea that you were riding anything with such potency.

But then you see them off in the

distance, straddling the road looking like the riding equivalent of three cherries on a fruit machine – the national speed limit signs that offer tacit approval from the state to find out what a supercharger can do...

There's no need to drop down to a lower gear, as the H2 in top can handle anything from 2,500rpm, but by slipping in a lower ratio or three you suddenly get your £22,000-worth. You don't accelerate on the H2, more like enter a Star Wars warp factor as you get the sensation of you flying faster than light. Your intention is to check out boost pressure, revs and speed, but your eyes are on stalks focussing on whatever road is left rather than processing these more trivial matters. I do know that the bike 'only' does about 83mph in first, and that the wheelie control is brutal if you blindly gas it. It slams you down in the first three gears before having a more subtle effect in the next two. Yes, two.

The H2 brings a new definition to speed. Any deceleration encountered through the intervention of wheelie control or the quickshifter is massive – almost like hitting a brick wall. The nose of the bike pitches forward as drive is momentarily cut, aptly demonstrating just how quick you're going.

You descend on cars scarily – for all involved. One moment you lock onto a car that's half a mile ahead, and the next you're squeezing the brakes desperately with the bike's single projector lamp searing onto the rear bumper with the driver doing a double take in his mirror,

wondering where the hell you've come from. Crests suddenly come from nowhere, and the bike thinks nothing of lifting its front over something you'd never consider to be a launch pad before.

I've experienced nothing like this on the road. Sure, litre sportsbike are fast and their terminal velocities are similar to the H2's. But the way the supercharger reaches these speeds is truly unique. It needs no momentum to hit these highs, you don't have to be pinged off the redline in each gear like on any other machine. Just twist the H2's throttle, especially from 7,000rpm in top, and you're transported to another world of pace.

The supercharged motor was built for straightline speed, that facet has made itself plain, but what about the rest of the bike? How can any chassis cope with these demands – be it on Qatar's smooth arcs or on weather beaten Tarmac back here? For a start, the brakes are bang up there with some of the

HOW MUCH!

Yes, the H2 is expensive, but there are plenty of other manufacturers out there with bikes at around the £22,000 mark – with many asking much more for their wares. Here's a selection of alternatives at the sort of money Kawasaki is asking for the H2.



Ducati 1299 Panigale S
£20,795



Ducati 1199 Panigale R
£28,995



Ducati Diavel Titanium
£22,995



Aprilia RSV4 RF
£18,135



Harley-Davidson CVO Limited
£30,295

TECHNICAL Kawasaki H2



ENGINE	Type	998cc, I/c, 16v, DOHC, supercharged inline four
	Bore x Stroke	76 x 55mm
	Compression	8.5:1 (8.3:1)
	Fuelling	EFI, 50mm throttle bodies
	Tested Power	193bhp @ 11,000rpm
CHASSIS	Tested Torque	125Nm @ 10,500rpm
	Frame	High tensile steel trellis
	Front Suspension	43mm KYB AOD II fork, fully adj
	Rear Suspension	KYB monoshock, fully adj (inc high/low speed)
	Front Brakes	Four piston Brembo monoblocks, 330mm discs, ABS
DIMENSIONS	Rear Brakes	Two piston caliper, 250mm disc
	Wheelbase	825mm
	Seat Height	1,450mm
	Dry Weight	238kg
	Fuel Capacity	17 litres
PRICE	Price	£22,000
	From	www.kawasaki.co.uk

INSURANCE

Much has been made of the insurance costs for the H2, so we jumped on an animal based comparison website to find out more. To insure me (41 years old, garaged, 10 years NCD and over 15 years of experience) the only company that came up on the site was MCE who wanted £7,183 for the pleasure of insuring the bike with comprehensive cover. But this doesn't tell the whole story, as Kawasaki runs its own insurance scheme, where the figure comes in at under £1,000 for the same level of cover. Phew...

best. The Brembos really do a manful job of scrubbing speed, although if you give in to the H2's temptations too often we reckon you'll need to factor in new pads at the same rate that you'll get through tyres. The ABS is, like the rest of the H2's electronics suite, nigh-on flawless.

But it was the corners at Qatar that developed issues with the H2. Specifically, when corners and engines mixed, a bit like electricity and water... Tap on the power on or around the apex and the supercharger thought things were upright, spinning the impellor madly and injecting all sorts of speed into the equation, sending you agonisingly offline. And that's exactly what I found on the road as

I rode round for some pictures. Riding it like a normal bike, so approaching a turn, braking and banging down the gears, then applying a racy amount of throttle to guide a bike through an arc, and the H2 suddenly started feeling flighty.

Ask for a few more revs from say, 6,000 revs, and by 6,001rpm the supercharger's effect suddenly feels an awful lot like dodgy fuel injection. The bike lurches forward, sending you offline and engendering little confidence in the H2 as a scratcher – not helped by the inherent resistance of the next-gen Showa BPF forks opposing any dive.

It hadn't felt like this over the 150 miles I'd already got under my belt, so that got me thinking. I changed my approach to these

corners, sticking the bike in a higher gear, third or even fourth, and with the revs now below 6,000rpm (but still pulling like a train pulling another train) the transition to throttle was cleaner and far more forgiving. Now I was able to concentrate on lean and looking good for the camera. The H2 is not a normal bike in so many ways, and this is another one of them. Snapper Jonny also noticed the difference, having to adjust to the extra speed as soon as the engine noise increased. He said he's not seen anything like it since he photographed his last 500cc GP race...

In more open turns, I was impressed in the way the shock handled doling out close to 200bhp. There's a left hand corner close to home that I know intimately, and when I see SLOW daubed all over the road that's my cue to gas any bike hard and let my shoulder brush the cow parsley that's now growing furiously on the inside of the turn. With so much power available it would be



Yamaha V-Max Carbon
£18,749



Bimota Tesi 3D Naked
£25,450



MV Agusta F4 RR
£19,999



Honda Gold Wing
£25,999



Ford Focus Titanium X
£22,095

understandable if the Showa shock capitulated and soaked up too much weight transition, leading to chronic understeer. But the H2 remained stoically online, the cow parsley getting no let up, leaving me with plenty of road to play with on the exit. Helped ably by the Bridgestone RS10 rubber, and with a little adjustment in your riding, there's no reason to fear the H2 in a corner – it's just the straights that require you to man up.

Things did get silly and the H2 consumed me and made me do things I haven't done in quite some time that are neither big or clever (is anyone important looking? No, alright then. They are big and clever). But at the end of my last ride on the H2 I was glad that the 30mph signs loomed into view, meaning sanity was just a few hundred yards away. That meant that I no longer had to live up to the bike's reputation and that my brain didn't have to plan moves hundreds of yards ahead. The H2 slowed and the supercharger whistled its last ditty. It also emitted a burnt wood smell that I remembered from the launch and assumed was a kneeslider. Every sense is involved on an H2 ride.

I pulled up outside the house and for the first time ever wished I smoked. Sparking up a fag seemed appropriate, a buffer between the Superman world I'd just lived in and the Clark Kent life I usually inhabit.

There's no doubting that this bike, or rather this engine, is the craziest component ever. But thanks to the H2's price (understandable given the technologies and materials involved) it's never going to be anything but a rich man's hooligan tool. And rich men tend not to be hooligans, that's why they're rich. So I think the H2 will settle into life not as a defining nutters bike, but rather as a curiosity, a machine occasionally glanced but often referenced. Behind the iron fist is a velvet glove, but despite its looks, components and inspired inception, all you'll think about is the phenomenal clout that mitt is capable of... **6**

Verdict 10/10

Ride it right on the road and the H2 can provide the ultimate thrill. Mad, but not quite insane...

- + POWER, LOOKS, GLORY
- PRISON PROSPECTS



Not as easy as it looks...

ON THE DYNO

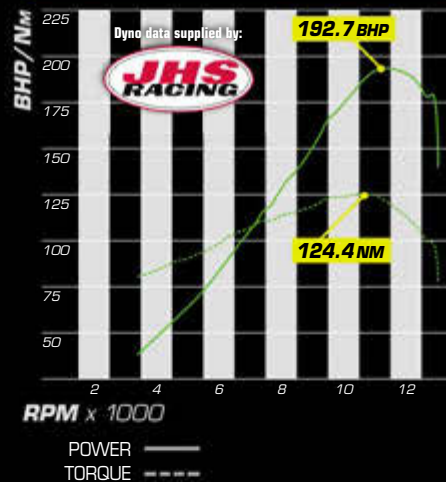
James Holland is no stranger to bikes with big power, but what of the new H2?

"It's bloody fantastic! There's obviously a lot more potential, and that's why they've made the R. It revs quickly, but I want to get my hands on the R to see what pressures they're running on the charger because it's only making ZZR1400 power. The bike is currently running unstressed, and the R's engine isn't radically different so it won't take much to get to the extra power."



Power mad!

POWER AND TORQUE



Fields of glory...

Highlights

- ▷ Super-duper charger
- ▷ Stunning looks
- ▷ Sumptuous components
- ▷ Electronics galore
- ▷ 238kg
- ▷ 193bhp
- ▷ £22,000

▷ TRACK	8
Not really its bag	
▷ FAST ROAD	10
Stunning in sweepers	
▷ HOOLIGAN	10
For speed alone	
▷ NEW RIDER	10
Insurance?	
▷ DESIRABILITY	11
The R takes it to 11	

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James Hillier #1



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TOTALLY LOONY?

The Kawasaki H2 isn't the only bike that's earned a bit of a reputation. Back in 1997 there was another bike making a stir on the scene – the Suzuki TL1000S. But how has time changed this infamous widow maker?

WORDS: ROOTSY PICS: JONNY GAWLER



On the run up to the advent of the millennium bug, I took advantage of a cheap loan from the bank hoping that the collapse of everything electronic would wipe out any future payments. My application was approved in the knowledge that I'd make payments beyond December 1999 no matter the damage the bug generated, and so with £6,000 burning a hole in my pocket, I went off to buy my first brand new bike – ah, them were the days...

And the new bike I wanted was a bad boy,

a widow maker, the most deranged machine to ever escape the captivity of Japan at the time – a Suzuki TL1000S. I'd read all about it in the magazines, poring over every report and diligently investigating every possible foible that was generating its deadly reputation. I ended up spending a small fortune on anything with TL printed on it...

I loved the concept of the TL; a radical switch to a v-twin powerplant that all but guaranteed racing success if Ducati's fortunes were anything to go by. The looks I was in

awe with, the half fairing showing off said motor and the bike signing things off with that platypus of a tail unit. Some hated it, but I thought it was s-weet. The graphics were great, the opportunities for upgrading were fantastic and, ultimately, I could just picture myself astride this bike pulling massive wheelies away from the lights and leaving big dark lines as a signature card at the exit of every corner.

And that's why I bought an R6. Ultimately, I'm a head over heart person, and as much

“THE TL-S'S NEUTERED 105BHP FEELS SOMEWHAT STRANGLING IN AN AGE WHEN A LITRE V-TWIN SHOULD PUMP OUT 160BHP...”



Holding back the years...

As I longed for the big Suzuki, I found a dealer in Folkstone who had massively over ordered supersport stock and was offering a spanking new R6 in red and white for five and a half grand to clear a space in his shop. I saved a bit of money over the TL and got a better bike at the end of the day; that's what I kept telling myself. The R6 couldn't have the same character of the Suzuki, but it would be a more willing partner in my exploits on the road, and a more logical step up from my aging FZR600 that I'd campaigned on before I approached the bank that likes to say yes.

But I've always hankered after a TL1000S, or even an R with its swathes of plastic and garish colours. However, racing, moving into the poorly paid world of motorcycle journalism and then spawning children with a wife that enjoys foreign holidays and regular trips to the hairdresser has always precluded

me fulfilling that wish. Maybe I'll go down the crowd funding route with all the sympathy I'm getting here...

I don't know why I want one, I just want one. Some think they're ripe for investing, buoyed by their bad-boy reputation, but like a house, I don't want to make money from one, I just want to own one to use and, most importantly, abuse.

That's why I was very interesting to see an absolute minter parked outside JHS Racing. My brain can't quite work out why someone bought this new and then proceeded to do just 2,500 miles over the course of the next ten years, but it'd be boring if we were all the same, wouldn't it? James had coughed up for it, spying a bargain on this ultra low mileage example and hoping to ship it on to someone who saw the bike as investment potential.

That person wasn't going to be me, but

distracting James on the topic of swarf, I quickly nabbed the keys to spend the day with the bike I never quite had.

This all felt like an affair must feel. I chose one course of actions back in my youth and this was an insight into another life I never had. I wasn't cheating on the R6, as we got divorced back in 2003 to pay for some unobtainium for racing, but the day on the bike had an illicit feel to it, especially on a machine with as rumbustious reputation as the TL-S. This was going to be good.

I say rumbustious, but what with its stock cans still being sported, the whimper from the 998cc v-twin motor was somewhat of a surprise. I was expecting shake, rattle and roll being generated from those big pistons thrusting up and down, but in return for applying some choke (remember that) and thumbing the starter I got a timid tickover, with almost a hollow feel to the motor while revving to considerably warm it up – something I would never have done back in the day, but I promised James I'd be nice.

In an age where a litre v-twin should pump out around 160bhp, the TL-S's neutered 105bhp feels somewhat strangled, almost like it's running on one. So in pure power terms, time hasn't been kind to the TL, but we've long said that around 100bhp is ample for the highways – the TL's extra five per cent a bonus. Taking James' TL on track would end in a grizzly demise for me, but this was never the intended environment for a TL's



Rounded, not sharp...



Old school!

TECHNICAL SUZUKI TL1000S



ENGINE	Type	996cc, 8v, DOHC, 90-degree, v-twin
	Bore x Stroke	98 x 66mm
	Compression	11.3:1
	Fuelling	Denso EFI, 52mm throttle bodies
	Claimed Power	125bhp @ 8,500rpm
CHASSIS	Claimed Torque	103Nm @ 8,000rpm
	Frame	Aluminium trellis frame
	Front Suspension	43mm USD forks, fully adj.
	Rear Suspension	Rotary damper system, fully adj.
	Front Brakes	Four piston calipers, 320mm discs
DIMENSIONS	Rear Brakes	Two piston calipers, 220mm disc
	Wheelbase	1,415mm
	Seat Height	835mm
	Dry Weight	191kg
	Fuel Capacity	17 litres
PRICE	Price	Ask James!
	From	JHSRacing.co.uk

SHOCKING STUFF

As ever with these matters, the theory panned out fine, but when bike firms go off piste we start shuffling awkwardly. Conventional design works because it's tried and tested, so when some fresh face walks in and says something should be done in a different way it flies in the face of the perfectly performing part. Having said that, Brawn used such a design on the 2009 F1 winning car...

Suzuki went for the rotary shock design because a v-twin makes exhaust routing of the rear cylinder difficult. Packaging a bike up is a tricky task and when an exit pipe sits where a traditional monoshock should that's when heads start to get scratched. The rotary option would split the springing and damping functions of a traditional shock, enable the TL to have a short wheelbase and dissipate heat better.

In practice, the Kayaba-made shock struggled to deal with high internal

working pressures. Stiction is also a problem of the design, thanks to complicated sealing arrangements inside (this also leading to the unit also being non-serviceable). That exhaust being close also caused overheating, which the design was supposed to cure. But other influences also conspired against the rotary damper – namely the short wheelbase and no steering damper.



As muted as the graphics got...



The guilty party?

operation. So sticking to the roads I set off on the test ride I never had on a bike I could still never afford – but don't tell James that, I said I was interested...

The muted dark blue didn't float my boat in the way the original red one did with its gaudy graphics, but the riding position felt eminently usable. Though the fixtures and fittings looked like relics from a bygone era, the riding position built by swept bars and high clip-ons feels relevant for cornering action – although less so for more humdrum action.

It's different to be on something truly mechanical these days, where your inputs have direct actions applied to the recipient component. My head felt clearer knowing that I was in control of my own destiny, rather than electronics masking any miscreant use. Though injected, the drive off the throttle is clean and punchy in the right zone – that being anywhere from 4,000rpm up. It doesn't possess a heavyweight's wallop, but engage the right ratio at the right time and it delivers a hearty thump. The noise gets better with

speed too, at least on board, with the airbox's inhalation and motor's explosions doing their best to mask what little the pipes exhale.

But I'm still to see how this engine could have caused the problems that are so associated with the TL. It feels like one of James' perky supertwin race bikes, manful enough to pull the skin of a rice pudding, but not so outrageous that the chassis couldn't cope. So that meant it was time to coax it.

I remember reading so much about the bike's geometry, weight, power and ultimately its radical rotary damper rear suspension that caused the inherent instability on road. Suzuki acknowledged a problem by tackling the symptoms and supplying a steering damper on later bikes, but much was still made of that rear system – see the above box.

The TL-S eases its way through the roads I'm on, and to be honest they're not the challenge of a Dales dash or a Highland fling that would offer a more significant workout. So the bike does what a bike does. Brakes, turns and fires out again. I'm in jeans and a jacket, so I'm not looking to be signed up to Suzuki's MotoGP team, but I could easily get a kneedown if I didn't want to end up like a Bros wannabe with torn jeans.

Time has been relatively kind to the TL-S here, although every action needs an exaggerated input to generate some wiggle room if required. The brakes don't bite hard on the first squeeze and the tyres need plenty of time to warm up before they hark back to

A tart of a block...



their youth and start gripping. But the action of cornering itself is sweet. It tips in well; not super quick, but quickly enough in the environment. Your mind thinks it's a long bike, but the wheelbase defies this, offering agility and precision beyond your preconceptions. It struggles a bit to hustle it through a roundabout, as much an indication of weight and its centre of gravity, but it delivers precisely what it set out to achieve – to be an A and B-road bahn-stormer.

And there's so much potential here. If you get in at the ground floor with something a bit shabby you can spend what you saved in honing the TL-S to something near perfection. New cans lop weight and add power, refreshed suspension delivers more poise and added precision, new lines and pads return the bite to the brakes. There really is life in almost any old dog, not least this respectable hound.


In truth, I had too much respect for this low mileage, showroom condition stocker. I still want one, but I want a shabby old sleeper, something that looks rough but goes sweet. I want to buy one for a grand and go nuts on it; sticking it in the fast group on trackdays, terrorising the locals in town, and showing off my stunt skills whenever the wrong people aren't looking. My fling was at an end, but there are other models out there, and as I type I'm watching two bikes on eBay and scouring Gumtree for something one up from a shitter.

Ultimately, I'm at one with the TL-S's reputation. I love the era from which it came, the era of pegs down, front wheels up, Foggy summers, stone chips, Stone Roses, revs, raves, loud cans and even louder paint jobs. I want to still be able to get away with it, duck under the radar and ride hard.

The TL-S still feels thoroughly modern in a turn...

So is it the bike I missed out on, or do I want to turn back time and apply the skills I now possess to these halcyon days of the end of the millennium? My rose tinted visor thought the TL-S would be a belter, offering manful power and requiring manful control. But it's a bit of a pussycat, all told. It got a reputation because it couldn't deliver much else to be honest – and suckers like me dined out on this controversy. I'm not saying it

didn't have issues, because it did, but the biggest issue it had was the people on top trying to force it to be a GSX-R750.

Had I bought one back in 1999, I'm pretty sure I'd still own it. Characterful bikes from Japan don't come round very often, and the TL-S is surely the most characterful of the lot, certainly more so than my first R6... 

And off into the sunset – with James in hot pursuit...

THANKS

Sorry James, I can't afford it. But if you want the TL – or some work doing – call 0117 986 8844!

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addiction


STEVE PENPRAZE'S

SUZUKI HAYABUSA



Loud and proud, Steve's Hayabusa has the balls to back up the striking looks...

I had another Hayabusa in Fast Bikes years ago, but I got a new one as I like the way the power develops. It can be a kitten and a speed demon in one, it's a good all rounder. That said, it's never enough! When you jump on a bike it's always impressive at first, but after a while you get used to the power and hanker for more. I didn't want to go down the turbo route, and a supercharger takes too much of the fairing away, so I wanted to stay naturally aspirated

and go bigger; it's now at 1,440cc. With these latest engine modifications that's the end of it though; from now on I'll probably work on the suspension. I'm going to keep it for a good ten years, do a little bit here and there, add this and that. You're never going to get your money back on it, but that's not what it's about for me. I've got a Ducati Multistrada 1200 for the usual bike work, the Hayabusa is my showpiece, hence the amazing paint by Steve Willis of Llandow!" 



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MODIFICATIONS

STEVE PENPRAZE'S 2012 SUZUKI HAYABUSA

ENGINE

First gen' Hayabusa block rebored to 1,440cc – 240bhp
Yoshimura dual stubby exhausts
Vance & Hines 4 into 2 header pipes
Race pistons
Race camshafts
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Willis of Llandow





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WORDS: BENJAMIN J KUBAS CRONIN
PHOTOGRAPHY: GAWLER

BIKES **vs** CARS

THE BATTLE RAGES ON...

Welcome to the latest chapter of the fight that just runs and runs...

WORDS: ROOTSY PICS: JONNY GAWLER



Just the 800bhp
packed inside...



The bikes versus cars debate will never cease, and the next few pages are only going to add fuel to the fire – mainly to annoy the haters. But it's only natural to compare our machines to those who love four wheels, and the fact remains that these tests are barnstormingly good fun (but a bastard to organise with circuit owners never liking bikes and cars out at the same time). But how do you go about comparing two very different modes of racing transport? Price? Weight? Capacity? Power?

There's no right answer, but the one offered to us at Anglesey was to test Lee Johnston's superstock spec and North West 200 winning BMW S 1000 RR and some fruity motor owned by the East Coast Racing sponsor, Phil Reed. In the build up to the test, lots of words were mentioned about the car to entice us to come. Not being a four wheel aficionado, few

meant anything to me, but one figure stood out. 800bhp. That's a lot of power, by any measure (but in one more specific measure it's about the same as an F1 car), and surely enough to blitz a 204bhp Beemer.

Not only does the car have that whopping amount of power on its side, but it also has four wheels (meaning it's hard to tip it over), dinner plates for brakes (enabling it to stop ridiculously close to corners), and top spec suspension to ensure that every last millisecond is shaved off a laptime.

And laptimes are what this car is all about. It's raced by Phil in the UK's Time Attack

series. Yeah, us too. But what this race series is about is tazzing round a track trying to score the quickest time possible. Like most good things in life, it originated in Japan and is flourishing here in the UK. It's not racing, per se, more like qualifying. And we all know that qualifying is the true sign of a speedy racer. Phil was the runner-up in his class in last year's championship, so it's fair to say that he's a bit handy behind the wheel.

The car itself is very loosely based on a Mitsubishi Evo VI – but that's like saying Marc Marquez's Honda RCV213V is based on a CBR600RR. From 20 paces, the silhouette is similar, but the closer you get the bigger the differences become. 🏍️



The home of 204 ponies...



❏ The investment in the car has been massive; well into six figures massive. The bike is just a stocker with a few quid thrown at the suspension and a full exhaust – that's what the rules dictate. Five grand and you're there. The car on the other hand...

I'll let Phil run you through his pride and joy, "It's a 2.3 litre motor, so it's been stroked to make it bigger than the 2 litre standard engine. It's got a GT-37 turbo, which is a Garrett unit. We have experimented with smaller ones for smaller circuits for less lag, but we've moved on from there. It's set up to run nitrous, and we'll use that to spool the bigger turbo when it's off boost. When the boost comes in the nitrous will be fed out. It runs a dry sump and the oil's in the boot.

"It's a drive by wire throttle, like the bike in that regard. We've got three settings on the power; highest is about 800bhp, but if we're doing alright on pace we might turn it down a bit. We'll do six or seven meetings and the engine's good for that. Keeping the integrity of the head gasket is the key thing really, as they don't like too much boost. A lot of money goes on machining the cylinder head. There's a Quaife gearbox in it to cope with the power and a carbon fibre propshaft to reduce the inertia through the gearbox. Nitron provide the suspension (the same people that make bike suspension - Ed). It's got big brake discs, six pot calipers and then Michelin slicks. I can change the brake bias through the screens

inside. We run the geometry like the later model Evo, so we've made bespoke subframe so that we can adjust castor angle and the like. All in, it weighs about 1,200 kilos. A few bits have to be standard, like the suspension pick-up points, but then you can do whatever you like. That's about it!"

If all that sounds expensive, then it is. But the end result is that Lee can circulate around Cadwell in around 1:31s while Phil is a 1:33s man. That sounds close enough for a race, and if anything the awesome track at Anglesey offers a leveller playing field.

I got a shot in the car (with Phil at the wheel; there's no way in the world I can be trusted with 800bhp), and this new

perspective was truly enlightening – in a strange way initially. The first lap wasn't over with yet and it was blatantly clear we'd got a puncture, Phil hitting a kerb a little too hard. So it was back into the bits to change the tyres all round, switching to a different compound. At £300 a corner, that's no small financial undertaking...

But back on track it's the violence on the brakes and corner speed that is so unlike anything on a bike. Going into turn one and then up to the slow lefthand corner at the end of the back straight, the braking markers in the car are sensationally late. My shoe was buried into the passenger footwell at the point where I'd be braking on a bike, but Phil's foot was flat on the other pedal. Top speeds on the straight bits were staggeringly similar, with Lee managing to hit 142.9mph and Phil topping out at 140.9mph. But here's the thing; Phil hits this speed that little bit later and then manages to slow to 35mph for the hairpin. Lee has to start his braking earlier, but still hits the apex at 36mph.

The acceleration of the bike is the key to keeping it in front, no matter that this was once the fastest Evo in Europe (with an amazing 8.79s quarter mile time). The bike jumps out of the corners quicker, but the car makes almost all of that up by being able to

Time was lost by Phil by looking at the vista in his rear view mirror...

50.9mph vs 54.1mph
TURN SIX

ANGLESEY CIRCUIT

BIKE vs CAR

103.7mph vs 105.0mph
FRONT STRAIGHT

BACK STRAIGHT
142.9mph vs 140.9mph

LAP
1.09.75 vs 1.11.01

TURN THREE
85.7mph vs 86.7mph

BIKE VS CARS AROUND THE WORLD

ISLE OF MAN TT.

Outright car lap record: 116.40mph – Mark Higgins, Subaru WRX STI

Outright bike lap record: 132.298mph – Bruce Anstey, Honda Fireblade



Easy peasy for the bike!



Taking full advantage of rubber on four corners...

brake later. That theme carries on through the lap; apex speeds are pretty similar, despite Phil's four massive contact patches compared to Lee's Dunlops in touch with the ground.

The other thing that struck me was just how safe I felt strapped in and wrapped up by a rollcage. Phil's application of the throttle was pretty much on or off, whereas even with BMW's advanced TC system, you still have to play with the throttle to guide it through to the exit of a turn. The slicks of the car just gripped and gripped and gripped – sometimes a bit too much, giving that go-kart feel when you enter a corner too fast and lose momentum as a consequence. I got a go on the bike after this session (see overleaf), and

the grey strip of Tarmac in the middle seemed to have narrowed, despite being on a machine a fifth of the width.

In the end, there was just over a second in it, with plenty of banter flowing between both sides of the garage over the result. But what does it prove? It proves that both fast bikes and fast cars are brilliant fun, and the technology on both of them is staggering. It also proves that they're ruddy expensive, with the car burning through fuel at a cost of £9 a litre. This all mounts up when 'economy' figures are well south of 10mpg...

So not only is the bike quicker, but it's a hell of a lot cheaper too. That means it's another win for us; bikes remain the best! 🏍️

THRUXTON

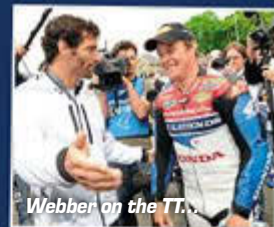
Outright BSB lap record: 1.14.890 – Gregorio Lavila, Ducati 999

British Touring Car lap record: 1.16.192 – Andrew Jordan, Honda Civic

SILVERSTONE

MotoGP lap record: 2.01.906 – Marc Marquez, Honda RCV-213V

F1 lap record: 1.33.401 – Mark Webber, Red Bull Racing



Webber on the TT...

DONINGTON PARK

WSB lap record: 1.27.716 – Tom Sykes, Kawasaki ZX-10R

World Touring Cars: 1.37.380 – Robert Huff, Chevrolet Cruze

PIKES PEAK

Car: 8:13.878 – Sebastien Loeb, Peugeot 208

Bike: 9:58.687 – Jeremy Toye, Kawasaki ZX-10R

MACAU GRAND PRIX

Motorcycle lap record: 2.23.616 – Stuart Easton, Kawasaki ZX-10R

Car lap record: 2.10.732 – Edoardo Mortara, Dallara Volkswagen



Easton's got the bigger balls...

RIDING THE BIKE

Watching Lee ride round the best circuit in Britain under a brilliant blue sky was all too much, I had to have a go. I've spent a fair amount of time riding BMW S 1000 RRs here over the years, and they're hard work on track, requiring a big loin-girding session to get the round at a reasonable lick.

The first thing I had to do was get on it. I'm not sure about anywhere else, but when it comes to height, Lee's not that well endowed. I was expecting my knees to be up round my ears, and there was a worry that my Euro 45s would require the shift lever to be extended, but no matter on all counts, this was a decent fit (apart from the big bum stop Lee has on the back of his seat).

With the Dunlop D212 GP Racers cooking in blankets, it was time to go on the B of the Bang, but in this case, I was more lowercase than Lee's big uppercase starts. Diving straight into Anglesey's corners, the first revelations was how easily and willingly the BMW points its snout at an apex. Stripped of all its road-going accoutrements, the 600cc feel to the bike is mirrored by its enthusiasm into a turn. Johnston later made the point that you have to be careful on the BMW because, "It sucks you into to riding it like a 600, carrying lots of corner speed, as it feels like it's a supersports bike." And he's right, it does.


The five grand or so sunk into parts to create this bike have been expeditiously spent, but the initial reaction is the massive weight saving by junking all the road kit is just what this bike needs. The addition of the Akrapovic full system and PCV (soon to be replaced by the BMW calibration kit) liberates a few wild ponies, and creates more torque, but in standard trim the bike is hardly a shrinking violet. The throttle connection now is much crisper and more appropriate for the track, delivering on time, every time (apart from a little hole I found coming onto the back straight in third at a too lowly 7,000rpm – a rev range unknown to Lee). And for those few fleeting milliseconds that I dare ask for 100 per cent throttle down the back (not) straight, it responds in breathtaking fashion, requiring quick shifts down the 'box (it's on a race shift) through to fifth. I don't dare look at the

clocks, but the sensation is this is the fastest I've ever ridden through here.

Then it's onto the tighter stuff, especially as we're using Anglesey's shortened coastal circuit. The left at the end of the back straight usually highlights my clumsiness, with soft road bike suspension and slack throttles adding to the ungainliness of my actions through here. But now the BMW is scalpel-like, flattering my moves, before turning to use more of the track to open up the hairpin at Rocket. Thoroughly confident in the grip the Dunlops are giving me here, it's on with the application of the gasser to Peel, whose slightly off camber exit had Lee spinning earlier, whereas I was more content with grinning. I've had many a moment here, but with Snowdonia appearing before my very eyes over the crest (with the wheelie control kicking in depending on my hamfistedness), the Beemer offered nothing but total reassurance. The corkscrew-esque penultimate turns, a quick left-right, highlighted how easily the bike changes direction, and then it was on to the last turn, where a good exit is crucial to showboat in front of the assembled team.

Each lap gets better and better; it's a machine that allows you to exploit its complete potential by

having safety nets to cushion any over exuberance.

Exiting the second turn hard on the throttle and hitting a bump just as the bike makes peak power would get its head shaking, but aside from this the S Thou' was as mild mannered as a 204bhp superstocker could possibly be. Having said that, the prospect of setting off down Bray Hill with a full tank and fresh rubber is a real sphincter shrinker, and the relatively open confines of Anglesey are a world away from the bumps between Ginger Hall and Ramsey. Having miles upon miles of those undulations at the exit of turn two is a prospect that separates the men from the boys, and given this context I'm happy to hand the bike back to its master for the day job... 



Lucky for some...

A NW200 winning and TT podium reaching machine (the bike, that is...)



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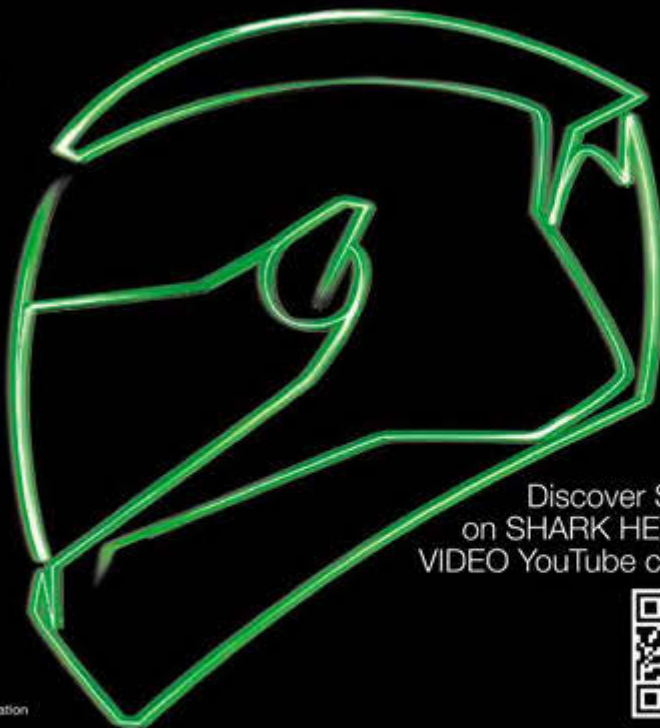
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*One wheel or two, how you ride
the Cannonball is up to you*



*The grid forms ahead of
another fun-packed day...*

TEN MINUTES WITH...

NICK DUNCAN



The ultimate road trip?

Nick Duncan is the man responsible for the Cannonball Bike Run, an annual blast by bikers across some of the best roads in Europe...

We're currently planning our 11th Cannonball run.

And I've been involved in the ten previous trips. Our background was doing driving events in Europe. We were involved in the first Gumball rally and the first two Cannonball car runs as well. But we thought the potential to do this with bikes was great. We sorted the routes, got the word out and in that first year we had 25-26 bikes, including Fast Bikes! The next year it jumped to 40 and it's been around that number ever since.

Things dropped a little when we went to Morocco one year.

It's that bit further away and we found that people weren't as keen to get there in the first place, so numbers dropped back to the mid-20s again, before we returned to Europe.

Around half who come are Brits.

The rest come from all over. We have a regular three bikes from the States who have been on the last seven Cannonballs. They were flying their bikes in, but after the last one they've found somewhere where they can leave their bikes over here now. Year on year we get about 50 per cent repeat business.

Compared to the car events, bikers are great. They're less precious.

They just love doing what they're doing, regardless of the bike they're on. The car boys are definitely more precious about what they're driving. With the bikers, there's a big overall feeling of 'we're in this together' and in the evening it doesn't break down into little cliques. People ride in smaller groups, true, but that's because they're with mates or they find someone at a similar pace as them.

This year's route we've haven't been to for the last eight years.

Every year is a new route, but this year's is really new. We start in Northern Italy and finish at the Oktoberfest in Munich. Where we go in between – nobody knows! The riders will find out that morning. All the routes were done by us; once as a rough and then a month before we give it a final check.

You'd think me doing the recce would be a perk of the job.

I can say there are other issues. I know a lot of Europe through other events, so I want to join up the best bits of those with some new bits, but then roads change over the years or you come across roadworks – which means going back 58km to find a way round them. We work on a day and a half recce-ing per day. For the last one in Spain, out of 48 hours we spent 45 hours doing one day's worth of routes. By the time we'd finished the hotels were all full so we had three hours sleep in the hire car...

Preparation for any rider is to get some sleep in. Lots of it, too.

It's roughly eight hours riding a day, between 250-350 miles a day. Wherever possible we use single lane roads and we try to keep bigger roads or ring roads off the routes. We want the best roads; be it surface, scenery or rideability. The bike should be ready to go, as should you.

It's down to each individual about what pace they ride the Cannonball at.

Some are nice and steady, others are faster but do it in bursts. But there's only an hour between the first and last – and there are no prizes, it's about how you want to ride it. So it's all quiet hare and tortoisery in the end.

We're not going to Switzerland.

There are always issues in Switzerland. Elsewhere, we've had very few problems with the police. Germany and France have a few problems, but elsewhere is remarkably pain free. The places where we go aren't heavily populated, and in the grand scheme of things you're not going that fast up these tight roads.


What the guys want are great riding roads.

We go for quality, not quantity. Banging in 650-miles a day is not pleasurable, so we go for better roads and shorter distances. I'd say the riding was hardcore enthusiastic – not hardcore burn everything off in sight. And then the track that we're going to is the chance to go bananas.

It's mainly sportsbikes that do the Cannonball run.

But we've had Harleys and last year had a Triumph Rocket III turn up. Anything smaller than a 600 might need thinking about, but otherwise it's a case of anything goes.

At the end of the day we want to provide an experience that people won't forget in a long time.

There's no point making it soft, you have to have a bit of pain to make it an achievement. So the evenings are full of everyone swapping war stories and lots of banter. Over a few beers there's nothing better... 

Does the Cannonball sound like it's up your street? This year's event crosses five countries from the 25th September, ending up at the Oktoberfest in Munich on 2nd October. Head to cannonballism.com for more info.

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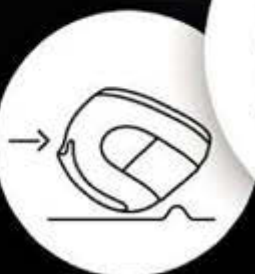
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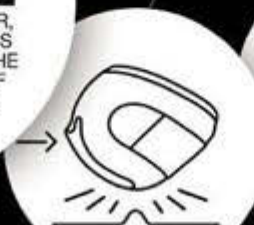
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1.

PRO Shade System

2.

Ecopure interior

3.

Speaker Pocket in cheek pad





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Life On Bikes

RIDING, MODIFYING, FIXING AND BUYING



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It's fair to say that it's been a very exciting month at FB HQ!

► Yamaha YZF-R1 ► BMW S 1000 RR ► Ducati 899 Panigale
► Triumph 675 Daytona ► KTM RC390 ► Suzuki GSX-R1000



K-5

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Used Bike Guide

SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR

A naked R1, what could possibly go wrong? Oh...

When news of the FZ1 leaked out there was a great deal of excitement within the motorcycle world. Yamaha had tempted us before with the prospect of a stripped-back R1, however the original Fazer 1000 turned out to be a soft and wobbly commuter. It was a great bike for covering miles in comfort, just not the frothing at the mouth naked that riders expected. Surely this time Yamaha would get it right?

Initially, all seemed well. Yamaha had recognised that a certain section of riders appreciated the Fazer's practical side and as such had given them the half-faired FZ1 Fazer as a reward. However, it had also spotted the growing trend for sports naked, so to meet this demand there was the FZ1 – a proper inline four streetfighter with a claimed 150bhp, flat bars and a whole heap of attitude. Which was the problem...

From the very first time riders threw a leg over the FZ1 there was a glaring issue. The bike's designers knew they had to inject some 'life' and 'spirit' into this

machine aimed at European riders, however what the Japanese thought equalled character didn't exactly translate into the final product. In fact, it very nearly spelt disaster for the FZ1 range.

The FZ1 arrived with what can only be described as a brutal throttle response. Going from a closed to a partially open throttle resulted in a horrible snatch and despite Yamaha describing it as 'explosive, sharp and aggressive', which they argued was in keeping with the bike's attitude, it was anything but pleasant. 🏍️

It can be wild, but the FZ1 is more like mild...



PRICE GUIDE: £2,950 – £9,799

Cheapest private: £2,950
23,195 miles, a lovely 2006 bike with FSH and a few extras.

Our choice private: £3,795
6,647 miles, very clean bike with a carbon Akrapovic can fitted.

Cheapest dealer: £3,895
16,400 miles, 2008 ABS version in excellent condition.

Our choice dealer: £4,000
15,568 miles, black 2006 bike with an Akrapovic end can and PC III.

Our choice dealer: £9,799
Pre-registered 2014 bike with 1 mile on the clock.

When you have a claimed 150bhp at the mercy of your right wrist the last thing you need is a lack of finesse. And the worst thing was there was no need for this abruptness as the R1 (whose engine the FZ1 borrowed, albeit with different cams and a heavier crank) was silky smooth in comparison despite making even more power. With the bike's designers already desperately trying to justify the throttle issues, things went from bad to worse as the FZ1's suspension then came under fire.

Yamaha had taken riders' comments on board about the Fazer 1000's wobbly tubular frame and the new FZ1 models were armed with a die-cast ally frame as well as fully adjustable suspension. While the front end was certainly a vast improvement, the shock was another story and its harsh action only highlighted the inadequacies of the throttle response. Where Yamaha was hoping for an enthusiastic reaction to its new bike, it received anything but this kind of feedback and in its first year on sale the FZ1 struggled because of this. Credit where credit is due, Yamaha quickly responded and the next year the bike featured an improved ECU and altered shock, but the damage was now done and the FZ1's reputation was permanently tarnished. The FZ1 fell out of favour and became the 'also ran' of the super naked world, overlooked and ignored by all but its most dedicated fans. However, these fans had the last laugh as they were discovering that not only was the FZ1 a bargain buy, it was also easy to turn into something very special indeed. Who'd have thought!

Yamaha couldn't acknowledge this, but all it took was a Power Commander and race exhaust to transform the FZ1's throttle response from brutal to near perfection. This modification completed, riders were left with a seriously fast super naked that was also very practical and super reliable. And with a few quid more spent on the suspension it could rival the best super naked out there at the time.

Once the initial throttle opening is sorted the FZ1's engine is an absolute beauty, packed full of smooth midrange torque that is backed up by a searing top-end drive. It's not the most exciting of engines if you compare it to the likes of the

ENGINE	Type	998cc, liquid-cooled, 20v, inline four
	Bore x stroke	77 x 53.6mm
	Compression	11.5:1
	Fuelling	Electronic fuel injection
	Tested Power	133bhp @ 11,500rpm
	Tested Torque	94Nm @ 9,500rpm

CHASSIS	Frame	Aluminium twin spar
	F Suspension	43mm inverted KYB forks, fully-adjustable
	R suspension	Monoshock, fully-adjustable
	Front brakes	Four-piston calipers, 320mm discs
	Rear brake	One-piston caliper, 245mm disc

DIMENSIONS	Wheelbase	1,460mm
	Seat Height	815mm
	Dry Weight	194kg
	Fuel Capacity	18-litres

SPEED	0-60	3.19sec
	0-100	7.06sec
	0-120	10.37sec
	Stg ¼ mile	11.30sec @ 125.06mph
	Standing mile	30.81sec @ 145.82mph
	Top speed	152.16mph

EXUP VALVE

As with any used modern Yamaha, check the EXUP valve isn't seized solid by watching the wires move during the start-up cycle. Also, take the bike for a test ride and watch out for the rev counter displaying an error by dropping to zero, returning to a figure and holding there, then returning to zero before displaying the actual revs. If this happens it means either the EXUP valve is seized or the Throttle Position Sensor (TPS) is faulty.

ECU

The FZ1's Achilles' heel is its fuel injection system, which started off really bad and gradually improved to an acceptable level as the bike evolved. An ECU re-map or a Power Commander and freer flowing exhaust end can make a world of difference to the throttle response. If possible, buy an already sorted bike as these modifications aren't cheap.

ENGINE NOISE

The cam chain tensioner can wear out on higher mileage machines, leading to a noisy rattle from the motor, so listen closely when the bike is started from cold. A few owners report older models suffer valve wear, but this isn't very common and if the motor sounds sweet it should be mechanically solid.

SUSPENSION

The FZ1's suspension is pretty poorly set-up as standard and on used bikes this fault will only be exaggerated by wear. The best money you can spend on an FZ1 is to get the forks re-valved and the OE shock replaced with a quality aftermarket item. Some owners change the forks for more modern R1 units with radial brakes, but re-valved and properly set-up OE ones are just as good and save you some cash.



FINISH

Yamaha knows how to build a strong motorcycle and the level of finish on the FZ1 is excellent. If the bike appears tatty then it has probably been used as a commuter and not cared for as well as one saved solely for sunny days. The used market is full of FZ1s so hold out for a good example.

MODEL UPDATE

The original FZ1 was launched in 2006 and subtly updated in 2007 with a softer shock spring and tweaked ECU as well as optional ABS. The bike was updated again in 2010 with engine management modifications. This model can be identified by its all-black exhaust end-can.

TPS

The Throttle Position Sensor can start to play up on older bikes, leading to poor fuelling and a loss of power. There is a routine to re-set the sensor (the internet is full of how-to videos), but if this fails to sort the issue you will need a new sensor.

ALTERNATOR

The potential of an alternator failure has created quite a lot of scare-mongering posts on FZ1 forums, but actual cases of the unit failing are very rare. If you are at all worried, buy a later model FZ1 which has a different design of generator.

GEARING

A lot of owners modify the FZ1's gearing as a top end of 150-plus mph is a bit pointless on a naked bike. According to the forums, the best ratio appears to be down one on the front and up one on the rear.

FUEL FILTER

If the bike feels lethargic, and it isn't the TPS's alignment, then check the fuel filter. Located within the tank, it often gets clogged up, restricting the flow of fuel into the injectors.

ACCESSORIES

A lot of FZ1s get customised in some way or another so be very wary of badly fitted extras or ones that are likely to make the bike fail an MOT. A lot of pre-crossplane R1 parts are interchangeable, but always be cautious of a heavily modified bike and check the history of who did the work.





Sort the suzzies, put on a pipe and the FZ1 becomes a viable option

RUNNING COSTS

Service interval:	
Minor:	4,000m
Major:	8,000m
Valve clearances:	24,000m

Service costs:	
Minor:	£150.00
Major:	£250.00
Valve clearances:	£380.00

Right fairing:	n/a
----------------	-----

RH Engine casing:	£54.52
-------------------	--------

Brake lever:	£49.65
--------------	--------

colourful Speed Triple or Super Duke, but it's solid, reliable and a very easy motor for road riding. And the same can be said about the FZ1's chassis.

Despite feeling a bit heavy, the FZ1 is very composed in corners and turns swiftly without threatening to ever get out of shape. Push it hard, especially on stickier tyres than standard, and the ground clearance can be a little limited, but that's more a testament to how good the chassis is rather than a negative point. And anyway, modifying the FZ1 is all part of the ownership experience and rearsets don't cost a fortune...

If you treat the FZ1 as the start of something very special then it's a brilliant bike that's still very good value when you compare it to its rivals. In standard form it's not the most thrilling of machines, true, but there's no getting away from it being devastatingly competent and a lovely machine to ride day-to-day. However, if you hit the forums and look at what people have done to their own FZ1s for inspiration (particularly French tuners) you had better have a block on eBay as it's very easy to get carried away.

This is a machine that is rife for upgrading through readily available parts (mainly from other Yamaha models) and can be transformed into something outstanding for very little extra cash – and that's why owners love them. If you fancy a project bike to gradually improve and put your own personal stamp on, the Yamaha FZ1 is the machine for you. Otherwise a pipe, Power Commander and a rebuilt shock can turn the FZ1 into a serious sleeper machine – innocent on the outside, but very effective indeed. Try one. **FB**

Verdict 7/10

Use it as a solid base to build upon and improve and you won't be disappointed.

- + ENGINE, POTENTIAL, PRACTICALITY
- FUELLING, SUSPENSION, GEARING

ALSO CONSIDER THESE:

KAWASAKI Z1000

2006

Private £2,500
Dealer £2,800

The Z1000 still looks great and has a strong motor, but is let down by a flexible chassis and soft suspension.

Engine 953cc, I/c, 16v, inline four
Power 122bhp @ 10,400rpm
Torque 99Nm @ 8,700rpm



TRIUMPH SPEED TRIPLE 1050

2006

Private £3,500
Dealer £4,000

A proper slice of British beef with a thumping triple engine and a decent chassis. A popular bike, hence the high used price.

Engine 1050cc, I/c, 12v inline triple
Power 116bhp @ 9,100rpm
Torque 103Nm @ 8,700rpm



KTM SUPER DUKE

2006

Private £4,500
Dealer £4,750

An absolutely barking naked bike from KTM that not only looks mental, it goes like stink. Generally on one wheel...

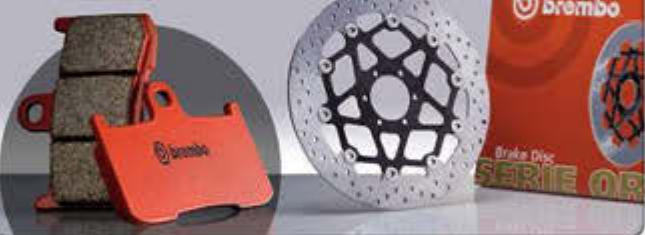
Engine 999cc, I/c, 8v, V-twin
Power 116bhp @ 9,500rpm
Torque 96Nm @ 7,000rpm



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WORDS: ROOTSY PICS: FB ARCHIVE

BRAND OF BROTHERS

KTM

KTM is a relative newcomer to our on-road game, meaning it's a bit off the radar for some. But this used collection proves they need to get on your radar, pronto!

Is there a more passionate group of people designing, testing and building bikes than those located in and around the otherwise sleepy little Austrian town of Mattighofen – those that declare themselves 'Ready to Race'? Though relatively new to this road bike lark, the factory has pumped out a stellar cast of machines, all bragging bags of attitude and no little skill to boot. Factor in aggressive lines, savvy design touches and powerplants that don't

know when to stop and you've got yourself a machine that brings out the best in you – or in legal terms, the worst.

Yes, KTM machines are not backwards in coming forwards. Throttle response is typically in your face, the punch of the motors is equal to Mike Tyson landing a haymaker and if there's one manufacturer who's sure to get you into trouble, it's KTM. Back at the factory they're probably shaking each other's hands at that last comment, before knuckling down to punt out yet more banging orange rockets. But if your budget won't stretch to a new one, what are the best options in the used part of the dealer. Well, we're glad you asked...



2007 990 SUPER DUKE

WHY YOU NEED ONE: You want to know how good 100bhp feels in this form
PRICES: First edition bikes from £3,500, 2007 examples from £4,250

This is the quintessential Austrian nutter; it must be something to do with the schnapps. The whacking big 999cc v-twin motor, dubbed the LC8 by the factory, has power in all sorts of places, and there's usually enough on tap to stick a wheelie up here or make an overtake there. In fact, it's far faster than it needs to be. With precious little wind protection on offer speeds above 100mph are only fleeting, never mind that fact that it'll push on towards 150mph with your chin tucked on the tank. Power was upped over the years, and the rev range extended by 500rpm, but even if you get one of the early bikes you'll get the gist pretty quickly. The last bikes out of the

factory were only good for about 110bhp, but don't let that trifling figure put you off – it's perfect for the road. Fuelling isn't brilliant, but again that got better over the years and the addition of a fuelling module always helps calm the surges. Exhausts are normally left stock or the über expensive Akas are stuck on, with few other choices available. Look for a fuelling module, too.

With brilliant looks, either in moody black or look-at-me orange, it's only the chassis and dangly bits that need to play their part – and boy do they get stuck in. The chassis is sweet, offering ample lean for a naked sportster meaning that you won't be out of place on track. Far from it, in fact, as the

Duke really rips up circuits – although stick to the smaller ones just to make sure you press home the advantages. WP suspension (that got stiffened over the years) and Brembo brakes (that got radialised in its last incarnations) are all top drawer stuff, meaning skids, stoppies, wheelies and good old fashioned kneedown is all part of the repertoire. It's almost the do everything bike of the noughties. Plump for the later spec R model if you want the ultimate in control, while the 2007 bike has tweaks over the original to give it more control, a better range and a dollop more power.

Build quality is good, though a few random niggles have blighted some bikes. But by and large owners love them and you'll have to console them as you take the keys. Just make sure the cops don't take them from you!

2008 RC8

WHY YOU NEED ONE: You want a pure cornering experience
PRICES: You could get lucky and bag one for £4,500



Mean and moody, but on the hoof the RC8 is anything but!



First off, KTM didn't do road bikes. Then they did. Then they didn't do big bikes. Then they did. Then they didn't do fully faired sportsbikes. And boy did they cross that off the list with the RC8. Although recession-wise the bike couldn't have come at a worse time, the RC8 had a stellar launch with the bike's looks, handling, performance and ergonomics all scoring top marks. Up against the likes of the Ducati 1098 and the Aprilia RSV-R, this zesty newcomer to the class was a breath of fresh air. It hit the ground running, and was able to match the abilities of its rivals, largely thanks to its sublime chassis and intelligent ergonomics.

It fits most people beautifully, kudos to the bike-riding designers who gave our limbs so much room. And if you want some more, then the pegs are adjustable, too.

The motor offers the classic superbike v-twin experience, albeit with a sharp throttle response that

can be calmed with the use of a revised throttle cam. There's no TC to mop up any excess power, so more control here always comes in handy for those moments when whatever tyre's fitted (it originally came on Supercorsas) can't cope. But if you like cornering and big lean angles then you've just found your perfect bike.

Prices aren't as strong as the Italian stuff, mileages tend to be on the low side and owners love 'em – making you wonder what they're doing parting with their pride and joy. So ask a few questions, ensure it's got a full dealer service history and look for signs of a loving owner – tidy garage, spotless bike, intimate knowledge, KTM T-shirts...

The R offers more punch and an upgrade in sophistication all round. The baby hasn't been thrown out with the bath water, meaning that it's still stupidly easy to use for a superbike, just better able to live with its more modern rivals – mind you, you have to pay for this sublime privilege...

2012 DUKE 690

WHY YOU NEED ONE: You like surprising people
PRICES: They were expensive to begin with, so £4k is a bit of a bargain now

If you're after a frugal little town bike, but one that may be able to surprise you when you open it up then the latest variant Duke 690 should be just the ticket. The single pot Duke has been a loyal servant to KTM, and in return KTM has blessed the latter variants with an ever bigger piston that loves pumping up and down – capacity has grown over the years from 609cc to the full 690cc now. Big bike owners will probably be thinking that all this is a bit beneath you, but you really need to give the Duke a shot because it's packed full of relevant power, and thanks to the engine's size and configuration it weighs next to nothing. This all means that it's up for a stunt or three, and there's no better bike to get learning on. There's not much that can go wrong on these bikes, and thanks to quality components there's not much that does. Upgrades are few and far between, so it's lucky that you've got all you'd ever need in the standard package.

You needn't bother with a front wheel...



2013 KTM 1190 ADVENTURE

WHY YOU NEED ONE: Places to go, people to see
PRICES: They're just creeping below five figures now

It would be remiss of us to dismiss KTM's Adventure merely because it's not an out and out sportsbike. The fact that it's powered by the same lump that the RC8 has means that it's very much able to ruffle a few feathers down the back roads – so the pheasants had better watch out. It lost a bit of its off-roadness in 1190 form, but the Adventure is adept at a decent pace on the road. But it's rubbish on a track, right? Er, it's actually a bit handy thanks to the motor being able to propel it to meaningful speeds as we found out a few years ago when we pitched it against an RC8 R. And the fact it does all this in supreme comfort is the cherry on the cake. Although it comes with its own electronics suite, the glacé that BMW owners are used to is absent, with those nice to have extras not included (heated grips and the like). But a thoughtful owner will have fitted these retrospectively. Don't be afraid of miles, as this is what the detuned motor is good for, and working on the bike isn't the headache it should be. If you can't afford this, then the 1190 Adventure is a proper go anywhere workhorse that's worth considering.



Now that's what we call an adventure!



2009 990 SM-T

WHY: You want to go a long way pulling wheelies
PRICE: £5k should get you an early one

KTM do concessions every now and again, and the SM-T was one such machine. Making an SM comfortable and able to do more than a blast down a back road was a brave move for KTM, and it never really paid off in sales. But that doesn't make it a bad bike, just one that only suits a few.



2005 950SM

WHY: You live one stop short of Dagenham – Barking!

PRICES: Around the £3,000 mark now

A whacking great v-twin dressed up as a supermotard machine flicks our switch, and it should flick yours too. Largely a Super Duke in a different bikini (there's that little clothing that you could hardly deem it as clothes), you won't stop laughing until you see blue flashing lights in your mirrors...

2012 FREERIDE 350

WHY: It's what winter's made for
PRICE: Upwards of £4,000

No round up of KTM machinery would be complete without sticking in an off-roader. KTM make the best mud pluggers about. The pros love 'em, but KTM is thoughtful enough to make some flexible, light, but punchy bikes that make learning the art of falling off in the mud that much easier – no more so than with the brilliantly competent Freeride.



A KTM's day job...

2012 DUKE 390

WHY: It's the best naked A2 option out there

PRICE: £2,500 is where things start

With the advent of the A2 licence category offering ample opportunities for those with the guile to take them, KTM rocked up with the funky little Duke 390 and cleaned up. Though made in India, KTM quality is clear and the bike's performance belies its price and capacity. Just.



Put your Dukes up!

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Riding

The actions and decisions to get to this point are many...



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DO SOMETHING – OR DO NOTHING

The moment you swing your leg over a bike you have to start to make decisions – or not, as the case may be...

Some parts of riding are simple. When the choices of action are limited or easy to grasp, riders feel in control. When choices are more complex or not fully understood, errors can occur. If riding sometimes feels like a coin toss – heads I brake, tails I gas it – then you have to realise that you have some work to do on your riding.

A rider's skills are improving when his or her choices yield consistent results. Recognising when our choices produce good results is the first step in trusting ourselves as riders. Choices come in all shapes and sizes. Common ones, like choosing which part of the lane to occupy, are both simple and powerful. Consider, for example, the choice to avoid the middle of the lane. Identifying the situation – the dark middle is mostly greasy car droppings –

and combining that knowledge with an action – shifting to one side of the lane or the other – results in a predictable and often confidence-building outcome. In this case, better traction.

Flicking your bike through a set of S-turns presents a rider with many more available choices and considerably less time to make a decision. Each individual action creates a ripple effect. The decision to steer now or to wait half a heartbeat is not trivial. It can be the difference between a good or bad line through a turn.

At almost every moment in the saddle, riders are confronted with the choice to do something or do nothing. Provided you have some measure of riding savvy and at least a mediocre command of the motorcycle's controls, good judgment amounts to little more than knowing when to – or when

not to – act. This something or nothing decision process begins the instant you let out the clutch. Just count the number of actions stopped or changed in that one simple act of releasing clutch lever pressure and applying throttle, and you may be surprised at how many there are. Every change, no matter how minute, represents a choice to do something or to do nothing. This is the micro side of skilled motorcycle operation. Some may say I'm looking too closely, but I contend these mini-decisions are what rule our riding.

Less-skilled riders sometimes seem bent on doing something all the time, and they appear busy because of that. Seasoned riders better understand when to act or not. Less experienced riders often look busy and nervous. Seasoned riders with evolved skills look almost lazy and relaxed, even

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ASK AN EXPERT

ALL THE CSS COACHES HAVE SPENT YEARS HONING THEIR RIDING, AND ARE PERFECTLY PLACED TO ANSWER YOUR RIDING QUESTIONS. SO DON'T BE SHY, ASK AWAY!

when executing complex tasks.

Sometimes action is required, and sometimes it's not. This is why telling someone to 'just relax' is poor coaching. In order to relax with confidence, riders first must know when to act or not act. In this respect, 'just relax' is the wrong advice, unless it is combined with specific suggestions on when and where to do something, so that later you can be lazy and do nothing.

In the final analysis, what you do is more important than what you don't do, at least when it comes to looking and feeling relaxed on the bike. A rider that knows how to make the right decisions proactively doesn't appear tense and stiff, like a rider who is anxiously waiting for something to happen and then trying to react.

Every rider has the goal to be smoother, faster, more confident, and to feel less at risk while riding. Each of these goals is achieved by making the optimum micro choices. To do or not to do, that is the question. Each twitch of the throttle hand, each stab at the brake lever, each false or mistimed steering input, each jerky eye movement, all create busy work and prevent smooth actions, speed, or your confidence from increasing. Every action has an effect, especially ill-conceived actions.

Understanding all this is the foundation of improvement, and the most direct route to the level of skill you envision for yourself and your riding. This is one time when you definitely want to do something, then - get yourself to a trackday or riding school and get to work on your skills!



Some bikes could do with more counter steering input...

COUNTER RESPONSE

Q Thanks to reading the Twist books and doing a few exercises on the bike, I now understand counter steering and use it all the time, whether on the road or doing trackdays. Everything went well to begin with, but now I have upped my pace a bit I feel like I've reached a limit with this action. Sometimes I'd like more control and would like to turn the bike quicker, both on the road and on track. Using my arms as levers, can I push and pull on the bars at the same time? **Scott, Colchester**

A We're glad that you have discovered the joys of counter steering! Being aware of it is a revelation for some. But to answer your question, yes, you can push and pull and it helps to overcome most riders' habit of resisting with the opposite bar. If you are only using the inside bar become aware of not resisting the steering action with the outside arm. Also making sure that the push on the inside bar is a forward push and not a downward push.

THROWING A WOBBLER

Q I've just started taking my KTM Super Duke R on trackdays and one thing that I've noticed is that when doing fast direction changes the bike is starting to shake its head which it's never done before. Should I fit a steering damper? **David, Hereford**

A Before fitting a steering damper it would be better to first make sure that you are not the cause of the instability through the direction changes. While transitioning from one side of the bike to the other, the ideal situation is to have as little weight or unwanted pressure through the bars as possible. To allow you to do this you'll have to use your legs to secure yourself to the bike as much as possible, by locking on with the outside leg against the tank. This needs to be done whilst braking; you can use both knees at this point and your core muscles to support your upper body to stop you pushing against the bars. It's best to use the legs to slide across the saddle (not up, over and down) by using the outside leg to drag your hips across from one side to the other - again trying not to use the bars as a lever point for moving your body weight. Even when exiting a corner use your legs to lock on by squeezing the tank with both knees because when hard on the gas, using the bars to cling to will create the unwanted head shake or instability. It's cheaper than a steering damper!



Use those knees wisely...



Better body position or more metal?

Technical



Wonder if this fuel stop has over-priced coffee and sausage rolls?

DON'T BE FOOLISH WITH FUEL

Do you know much about the fuel you put into you tank, or what can happen when it's in there? Has that snazzy bottle of performance enhancing fuel additive caught your eye? Hang on a sec...

JHS RACING OWNER/BIG CHEESE

James Holland runs JHS Racing in Keynsham, and he is our go to guy whenever we need a bike looking at. JHS Racing was set up in the mid 1990s and has since expanded as its reputation has grown. The workshop deals with everything, from scooters to superbikes. Having built and worked on race Suzuki SVs and Triumph 675s James has a wealth of knowledge with these bikes, but elsewhere James' knowledge is as extensive as it gets. So from tyre fitting to MOTs, from dyno work to suspension, James really does do it all. And here he is, passing on his years in the business to Fast Bikes readers!



With the TT going on as we speak, it got me thinking about fuel. More specifically, refuelling, and all the dangers involved – even with road bikes. You see a lot of people going into a petrol station and they sit astride their bike, pull the nozzle out and refuel the bike – it's another subject I've seen shared on social media recently.

At the end of the day (or until it's full, whichever comes first), you have to get off the bike to go and pay. So what's the first thing that happens when you put the cap on? It leaks out of the overflow onto the floor, as fuel expands when it gets warmer (it's nice and cool in the tanks below ground, that's why it's refreshing on your legs after a fill up on a

hot day). In the good old days when people had Monza caps you'd fill the bike and watch the tank just blow outwards.

What I'm saying is get off your bike, put it on the sidestand and don't brim it. 20p's worth of fuel isn't going to save the day! There's also the small matter of a fire hazard. It's not the fuel itself that catches fire, it's the vapour, so there's another reason to get off – before you actually have to jump off...

All the latest bikes now have 'Euro fill' caps, where there's a dish in the bottom that takes a Euro nozzle from the pump. This not only stops you overfilling the bike but also prevents any naughty diesel getting in if you're having a blond moment.

BIG RON?

There are obviously various different petrol options these days; unleaded, super unleaded, super this, premium that. Generally, just the base offerings of 97 RON (Research Octane Number) octane rated fuel is more than adequate for 99 per cent of everyday bikes. All you're paying for, nine times out of ten, is a little more benzene (an organic chemical compound and mixing agent). All the fuel manufacturers have a different blend in their fuel, and all do a near-identical job.

Common or garden-spec 97 RON does everything you want it to do. Despite what you read, changing to a more expensive fuel isn't going to suddenly net you

CONTACT JHS RACING: TEL 0117 986 8844 EMAIL JHSRACING@LINEONE.NET WEB WWW.JHSRACING.CO.UK



This pit stop was timed as 1958

another 5bhp. I've never seen an improvement of any sort, although you might get a cleaner burn – but certainly no more performance.

BIGGER RON?

Race fuel is different altogether. Here it's all about the oxygen content, baby. The more oxygen you can get into your engine, the more fuel you're putting into it, so you get a bigger bang. It's not necessarily the octane rating you need to look at – oxygen carrying capacity is more important, but it won't be as readily available to understand.

Racing fuel is more refined – with less carbon deposits and less contaminants. So they burn cleaner and, usually, that fuel has been designed for a particular bike/car/boat/mower. That smell of high-end race fuel after the burn? That's down to the refinery of it, and the fact some manufacturers and chemists add scents to the fuel. You may notice most proper race bikes exhibiting a white end to an exhaust, rather than the sooty black stuff you see on road bikes. You'll never get your road bike to look like that, purely because of the contaminants carried in pump fuel, which has to cope with a wide spectrum of vehicles; anti-corrosion inhibitors, longer lasting additives to allow the fuel to sit in tanks, etc. And the white exhaust tips doesn't mean it's running weak, which is another popular misconception!

Another misconception involves additives. Don't be fooled into thinking fuel additives bring performance gains. Pro Boost and other octane boosters were designed primarily for two-strokes from years gone by when they had detonation issues, and when tuned motors required fuel

that was often out of reach for many. If you're going to spend £5k on a race engine that'll shit itself after 500 miles, race fuel might be for you, but there ain't many people like that anymore.

DOFF THE CAP

Aftermarket fuel caps? Be very careful with cheap, nasty ones, as they have to be able to breathe. If you don't have cap that's working properly, it'll pressurise the tank, cause a vacuum, and you'll get delivery issues to the injectors or carbs thanks to scavenging. Standard items are generally bulletproof and developed to function with that particular bike.

DON'T DIY

Fuel systems on fuel injected bikes run at 3bar of pressure (for the pump), so don't try to disconnect your fuel pipe with your ignition switched on because it'll spray everywhere. And it won't be just a trickle – it's 3bar, which is an awful lot of pressure. Race bikes run up to 5bar...

SO KEEP IT COOL

The more heat you get into fuel, the more it expands, and the less oxygen capacity it has. If you park your bike up during a summer blast and leave it in the sun, don't be surprised when you come back and see a small puddle of petrol beneath – the fuel has expanded and it's escaped through the overfill pipe. Park it in the shade! The cooler the fuel, the better it'll perform, which is why you see all these race teams with the special silver tank sheaths on the grid. I've yet to see one at a club race yet!

PROPER TOOLS

ESSENTIAL WORKSHOP KIT

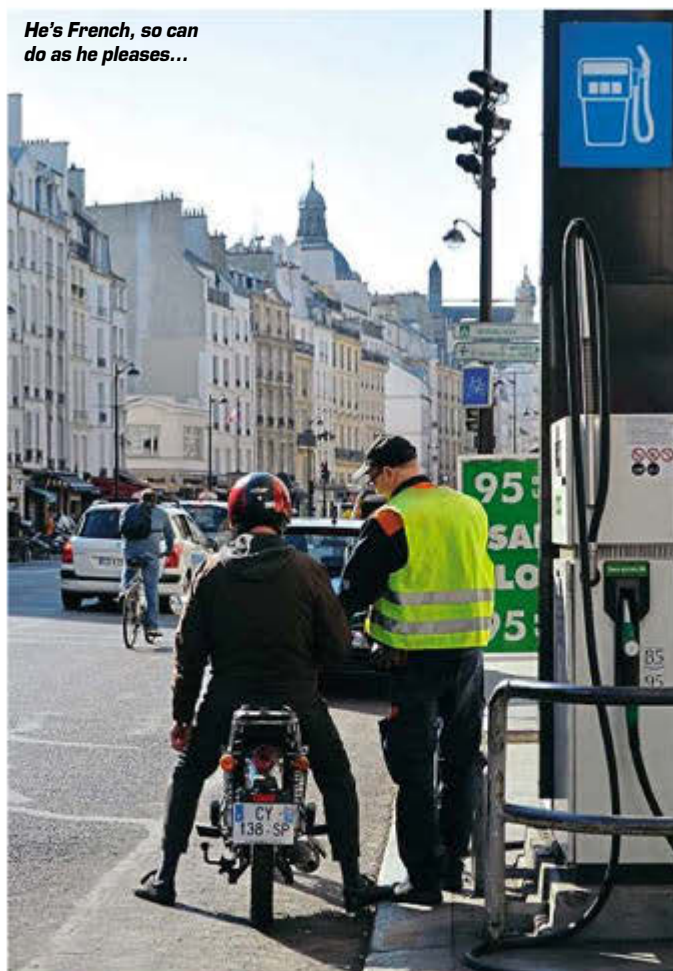
Stick 'em up!



WELLER EXPERT SOLDER IRON

■ It isn't new, but I use this nearly every day. I've had this Weller for a couple of years and she's getting a bit tired, but I've always had a spare. Every workshop should have one, especially for £50 – instant heat on the press of a button and perfect for any wiring jobs. Don't fall for the cheap alternatives though. There is also an anal hook attachment, and that's not for your bottom...

He's French, so can do as he pleases...



If you don't know the difference between yokes and yolks, Dzus and Zeus, or suspension and suspenders – email the experts letters@fastbikes.com



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PARTNERS IN PERFORMANCE

PETER HICKMAN

Fastest newcomer in TT history

CHOOSSES WEISE

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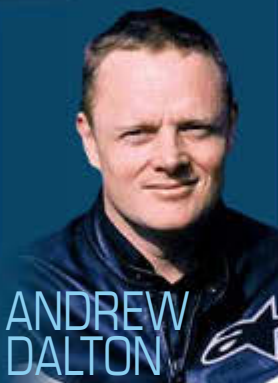
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Legal

If you've been a naughty biker, you need some decent advice, get it from: mail@whitedalton.co.uk



ANDREW DALTON

PENAL SERVITUDE PREVENTOR

The Fast Bikes Legal Clinic is compiled by Andrew Dalton, and his bike riding barristers and solicitors at White Dalton Motorcycle Solicitors.

They deal with personal injury claims and their sister company, Motor Defence Team, deals with all the motoring offences. They know everything about bike law. Andrew is a former London motorbike courier turned barrister and solicitor, and we know he's good. All the White Dalton lawyers are qualified barristers, or solicitors, or both - and they all have full bike licences, too. They don't act for insurance companies or the prosecution. They are Britain's most specialist law practice, and if they don't know the answer to your question, there probably isn't one. Don't rely on the advice from your insurance appointed solicitor, get proper independent advice.

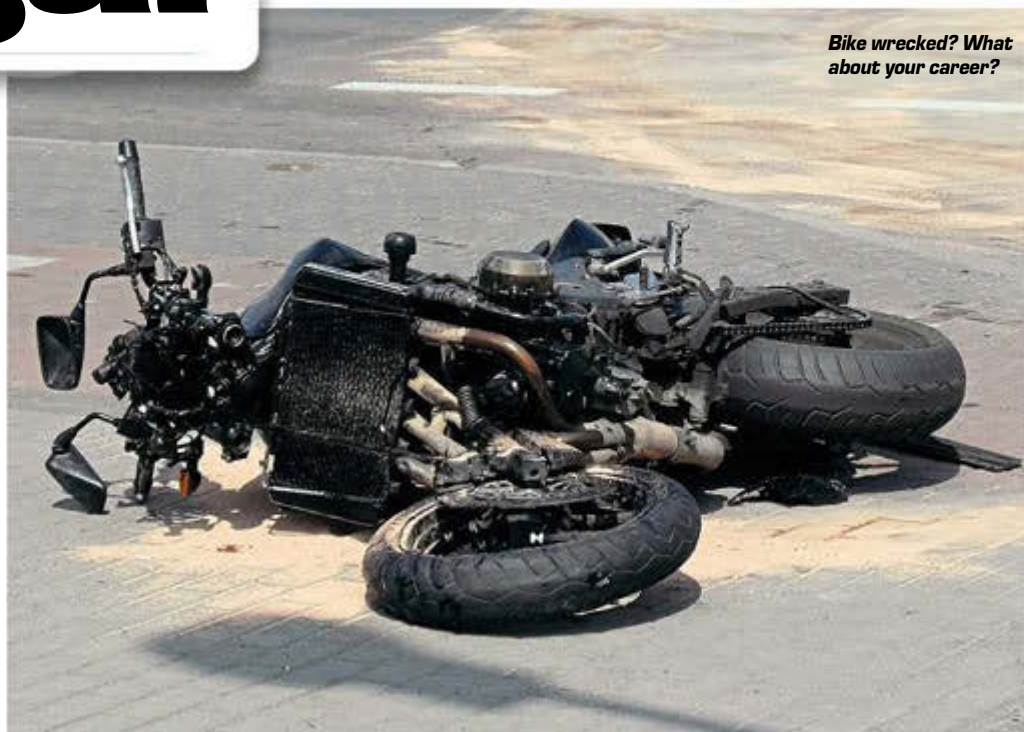
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Bike wrecked? What about your career?

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

About to start a new career but been knocked off your bike leaving you up the swanny? Read on...

Q I was involved in a serious motorcycle accident. At the time I was working as a labourer on a building site. Liability has been admitted. I very recently left the army where I had served for 12 years in the infantry, leaving as a local sergeant. I had obtained most of the professional qualifications required to work as a close protection security officer, having passed a medical, firearms and all other certificates. The only thing I was waiting for was my proof of no criminal record which has since come through.

I had a deployment date set, but I was seriously injured prior to actually deploying. My so called Solicitor has told me that I can only claim for the £110 per day I was earning as a labourer as opposed to the £360 a day tax-free I would have been earning as a close protection officer. The Solicitor has told me that future changes cannot be taken into account, and the Court would only award a notional sum for 'loss of chance' because 'my loss crystallised at the moment of injury'. This sounds like bullshit to me. Surely the law cannot be so unfair?

Name withheld

wanted to go into close protection work. If you had done nothing about becoming a close protection officer, then I can understand why your Solicitor would be advising you to be more pessimistic. However, you had the trade qualifications, a suitable history and a deployment date. The Court has to look at what was most likely to happen. The two options were that you as a 12 years served, 30 year old, full screw/acting sergeant would work for £110 per day (taxed), or taken the opportunity to earn three times this, tax-free, having paid out the thick end of £2,500 to get all your trade certification. I have no doubt that a Judge would find you would have been much more likely than not to go into close protection work. Your claim needs to be based on real and demonstrable plans. It was not a pie in the sky idea for you to go 'on the circuit' and you need to sack your current Solicitor who is advising you badly and weakly.

Not a career with prospects...



Chatter

STAR LETTER

SPRING CHICKEN

Just thought I'd share this picture of me enjoying my first trackday at Mallory Park in 15 years at the ripe old age of 48. I must say the big bang R1 was great fun and the Michelin 2CTs were a superb, giving

great feel. Looking forward to doing it again. Love the mag, please keep up the great work.

Martin Fisher

Top style Martin, age ain't nothing but a number – just ask Chris Walker, Troy Bayliss and Bruce Anstey!

It beats a zimmer frame!...



WIN OXFORD

A pair of awesome new Oxford RP-4 gloves – worth £39.99 – for writing the Star Letter!

Cowhide upper with synthetic suede Aniline goatskin palm - Silicone grip fingers - Pre curved wrist, fingers and palm - External seam construction Anti abrasion Aramid lining - Carbon fibre knuckle and finger guards - Moulded TPR retention strap Impact-absorbing padding. Available in S-2XL sizes.



WORTH £39.99!

And now Ellie wins a Kiddimoto balance bike!...



kiddi moto

KIDS' CORNER

Snap, Send and Win a KiddiMoto bike for your Marquez in the making! letters@fastbikesmag.com

Hey guys. My little girl Ellie would love you see herself in your mag. She loves pretending her little bike is like daddy's Gixxer!

Paul George



"He's stuck how much on the wheels?"



WORTH THE WEIGHT?

Dear FB

Re: Testing times, p74

"Lee comes back in again... wheel out of balance... 15 ounces.... a weight we'd struggle to notice."

15 grams might be hard to notice but 15 ounces! It was very funny!

Another enjoyable read, thanks guys.

Wyn Edwards

Ah, yes, well spotted that man. We were wondering why Lee Johnston was struggling a bit beforehand...



AS SEEN ON TWITTER

@barrymUK

Go get @fastbikesmag, @Jimbohiller37 sticker for increasing the value of anything it's stuck to!!



@zx636ghost

@fastbikesmag



@finnoctane It ain't helping the backlog I'm working my way through, but dat fresh @fastbikesmag doe :3



@TeaPotOne The joys of off-roading a Superbike! @SuzukiBikesUK @fastbikesmag @motohubb #Laos #TeapotOne

@Suze186 ..filing cabinet has kinda been stickerbombed!

@Vicky_Woodhouse @fastbikesmag @guymartinracing



VILLAGE PEOPLE?

We stopped to admire the scenery for a few minutes. Then the boys just spontaneously went all 'Village People' on me! "It's fun to stay at the Y.T? WTF? Dibs

The Village People turned out to be dyslexic...





Want your greatest riding cock-up, triumph, or just the missus' naked form immortalised in these hallowed pages? Email letters@fastbikesmag.com



AS SEEN ON FACEBOOK

Fast Bikes Magazine: So, imagine you can only ever have one of these style of bikes on track: two-stroke or four-stroke – which would you choose?

James Woodworth: My Yamaha TZR 250 SPR. Sugo kitted. Derestricted.



Csaba Torok: 4. 2 are too mental to handle for anyone short of superhuman. Rossi had his de-tuned back in the days.

Mark Harrison: Depends on the track... Cadwell 2t... Donington 4t.
Gary Wheeler: Mmmm? This? Or



the diesel? Sorry, I mean the K6. Most younger riders won't have ridden a stroker, so it's not a fair question is it?

Guy Paepe: Four stroke, not enough skills to ride a two banger too hard!

Dan Greenfield: Modern four pot 600's are awesome!! I could live without everything else.

Phil Sykes: 2-strokes are wild, insane maniacs that try to kill you every time you open the throttle... 15 years ago in MotoGP... I'll take 4-strokes, at least I might have a chance of not dying if I rode one.



Jules Winnfield: I'd take this all day.

Mark Maggot Davies: The smell of 2 stroke but then there is sound of 4 stroke growling and snarling.

Zarbear Zarbear: 4. Got fed up with seizing engines. My old RD 250 nearly killed me with seizing. Put me in hospital for 2 months. Never had any problems with four stroke.

Phil Miles:
Tough call?



And hi to you too!



HI TIMES

The missus says 'hello' from our villa in the Canary Islands.

Carl Martin

SHAKEY HANDS TIME

Shakey and me.

Stephen McDougall



SWITCHING SIDES

I'm a defector from S*****. I prefer to have the magazine in front of me while I'm away with work regularly. I'm well impressed with your mag. The content's right, features are well written, etc. I've only read one copy and subscribed straight away no hesitation.

Keep up the great work.

Graham Andrew

Economical
with the fuel...



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Travel & Tracks

GREAT LAUNCH ROADS: MONTSERRAT, SPAIN

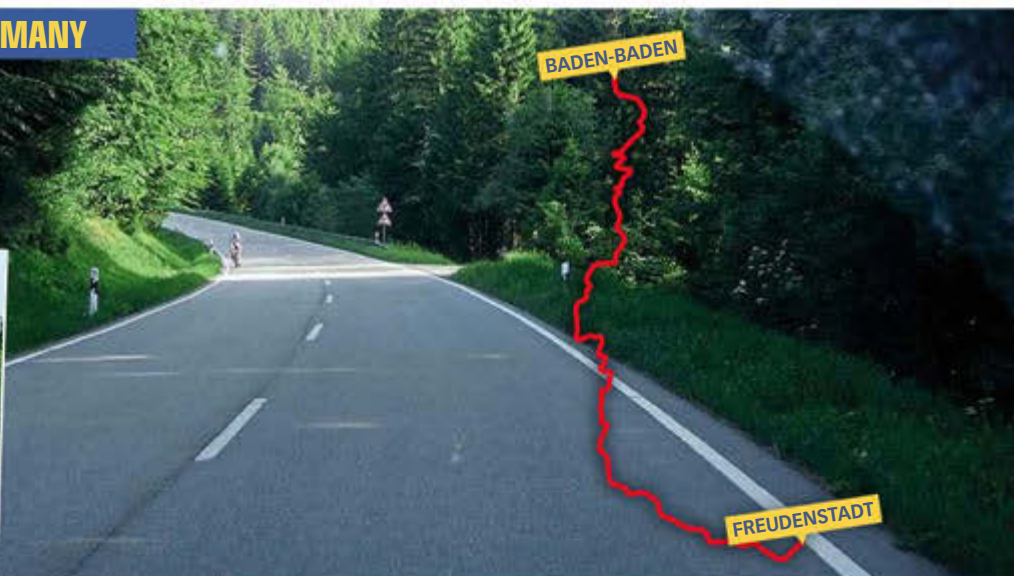
Great roads and great scenery go together beautifully, no more so than around the fabulous roads of Montserrat. BMW debuted the new S 1000 XR on the outskirts of Barcelona, and that meant that the usual run to the hills took in the stunning roads and vistas of the area. True, Montserrat is on the tourist trail, and as such it sees its fair share of buses up and down the hills, but if you get there early enough you'll practically have the roads to yourself. Plus, the further you travel away from the stunning backdrop of the mountains, the quieter the roads become.

The interesting bits are about an hour away from the middle of Barcelona, so get to the vicinity and find the BP-1121 that'll lead onto the BP-1103. The climb up to the summit is absolutely first class, taking in all manner of curves and cambers. It's quick, really quick in parts, and thankfully the roads have a great surface with very few surprises along the way. Once things level off, you'll get the odd straight mixed in with yet more turns, meaning you just need to follow the signs to Manresa and stop and have a restorative coffee in town before either turning round and racing downhill – always the trickier option – or exploring further north or west, because there are a hell of a lot of top roads in the area.



POSTCARD FROM: THE B500, GERMANY

This forest looks more green than black to us...



WIN

Tell us about your travels. Send in a story and some pictures (to fastbikes@futurenet.com) and you could win an ace Kriega R35 backpack – worth £145!

► QUADLOCK™ HARNESS ► EASY ON/OFF-ZIP IN/OUT SYSTEM ► TARGETED WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION ► PATENTED ALLEY ADJUSTERS ► 2 FRONT HARNESS ZIP POCKETS ► EXPANDING MESH POCKET WITH SHOCK CORD ► 6 POINT COMPRESSION ► SCOTCHLITE™ REFLECTIVE PANELS ► INTERNAL MAGAZINE SLEEVE ► 35 LITRE (2700cu in) CAPACITY

Kriega

**WORTH
£145!**



I'm just in the process of loading up for this year's holiday and wanted to offer a route from last year's summer trip in the hope of getting a new Kriega to trundle round on!

You probably know all about the B500 in Germany's Black Forest, but Germany was all new to me before last year. But I'll be going back again because this road is amazing, and there are lots of others that run close by that are all worth a ride up. These roads tend to be a bit smaller than the B500, so that meant they were perfect for my 675 Daytona as it's that bit more nimble than my mates' machines who are all on bigger litre bikes.

If you like long and sweeping

corners, then this is the place for you. The road surface is as you'd expect for Germany, and most drivers seem pretty polite (although they didn't like us filtering on the Autobahn on the way home – apparently it's illegal).

You'll come across the odd tighter turn that you have to be on guard for, but we ended up blasting up and down it all day, having set up camp in Baden-Baden – so good they named it twice! The locals were telling us that the police crackdown on bikes every now and again, but we had no bother at all – it was mint. Why the Germans got all the luck when it comes to roads!

Jarvid, Ashford

WHAT'S ON: NATIONAL BIKESAFE SHOW, CASTLE COMBE, 11TH JULY

There's a lot going on at the Combe over this weekend, and just because it's got Bikesafe in the title, don't expect it to be processional riding – because we couldn't fit in 'Trackday Experience' at the end of the title! That's right, for £30 you can take part in the observed ride and time on track – so you get some decent feedback on the road under Bikesafe supervision for an hour, then a chance to transfer to the track for a 15 minute session. If you're not up for that, then you don't have to put your hand in your pocket, because entry is free, but there's still plenty going on with a stunt display, trade stands and your chance to quiz the boys in blue. We'll be there too! For more info, head to www.bikesafe.co.uk.



TOP 5 TRACKDAYS

- 5th July – Pembrey – Focused Events – The Welsh circuit has a several ballsy bends...
- 6th July – Snetterton 300 – MSV – Track evening fun from £39
- 15th July – Donington Park – No Limits – Lady Maria Costello MBE Bsc Hons MP Women-only trackday
- 18th July – Bedford Autodrome – MSV – Road bike-only day at an underused circuit
- 21st July – Donington Park – Focused Events – A rare noisy day at Donny with Neil Hodgson at hand

SET-UP: GEARING UP (OR DOWN)

Changing the final drive sprockets not only affects acceleration and gear patterns, it'll alter your bike's geometry in a massive way and could need remedying depending on how you ride. Adding a tooth (or a few) onto the rear cog is a good, cheap, effective modification for trackdays, boosting acceleration and allowing more gears to be utilised. But it'll also shorten wheelbase and boost the rear's ride height.

The general rule of thumb works on a 2:1 ratio (adding a tooth is usually 2mm extra ride height and vice versa), though every bike is different with differing linkage ratios. You'll find the bike will steer quicker and squat less on corner exit, but you may also find that rear-end grip is diminished slightly. If you like it, fine, but reducing ride height or even preload could be advisable after a session of testing.

Likewise, taking a tooth off the rear sprocket (or off the front) will lengthen wheelbase and reduce the ride height, which will make the steering lazier and the bike harder work on acceleration. Although it might not sound like a big change on first impression, every millimetre counts when talking geometry. That's why race teams will butcher brand-new chains, or even change the internal gear ratios just to keep the optimum wheelbase and the geometry settings these engender.



COLD TRACKS: HOTTRAX NO MORE

One of the stalwarts of UK trackdays, Hottrax Motorsport, has closed its doors after years of trading (albeit that the company in another guise has been in this position before). It's always been a cutthroat world, but having done a few days with the company it's sad to see it go by the wayside. The company developed its business over the years, moving into the world of motorsports after establishing themselves in the trackday market. With plenty of dates booked up and the race series well established, it will disappoint many – not least those that have paid up front for race entries or trackdays and who have little hope of getting their money back – unless it was paid for on a credit card where there will be light at the end of the tunnel. In the mean time, that leaves two big players in the trackday market, Focussed Events and Motorsports Vision's days at their own circuits, supplemented by the likes of No Limits and other operators. Racers in the Hottrax series will gravitate elsewhere, with No Limits also offering entries in a variety of classes.



GRIP ADVISOR: DUNLOP SPORTSMART 2

It's not all about ball-busting outright grip and chasing tenths, sometimes. On occasion, longevity, consistency and the fact you can do more than a few laps without a tyre being trashed means financial rewards outweighs insane corner speed and massive lean angles. More road-biased rubber can still blend fun, safety and respectable lap times – with plenty of feedback, too.

The original Dunlop Sportsmart was good in a variety of conditions, but there was definitely room for improvement in certain areas, which Dunlop knew. There was an element of Dunlop's fabled carcass stiffness that made things sketchy in colder temperatures and the front tyre was often guilty of lethargic steering.

Dunlop has cured this with a sharper profile and a completely fresh compound for the front hoop, which equals a far more confidence inspiring ride and an eagerness to load the front-end, as well as being more willing to meet an apex. Meanwhile, the rear also features new compounds for its 'Multi-Tread' construction.

The overall end product is a more, er, Pirelli-ish sensation with a softer attitude and plusher feedback, and having already sampled the Sportsmart 2 on track, I'd highly recommended them. Within a lap of Brands Indy, I was comfortably knee-down and the rubber's limitations were always evident. Plus factor in you'll do miles on these bad boys!



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So potent, the R1 can even make crops bloom...

ROOTSY YAMAHA YZF-R1

TIME ON TEST:
1 MONTH

00917

ODOMETER
MILES

BHP: NA
GAIN: NA

NEXT AIM:
ORDER BITS

THIS MONTH I HAVE MOSTLY BEEN... "Dancing an R1 themed jig!"

We asked for an R1 more in hope than expectation, but when I got a phone call while on my way to the BMW S 1000 XR launch from Yamaha saying that they'd like to supply us with one, well I nearly fell over. Well, I would have done had the train carriage to Gatwick not been so overcrowded that falling over was physically impossible...

Yamaha is selling R1s by the boatload, hence the doubt as to whether we'd get one, but knowing that we'd put one to good use the boys from the 'Bridge (Wey) came up trumps. And I trumped Beej with the Editor card, meaning I'll look after the R1 this year. I still maintain he should have tried harder at school...

Then all of Charlie's dreams came true when he finally gave his MT-09 back and got to ride the R1 westward to its new home. That was on a Friday when I was away, so I came in on Monday giddy with excitement. But not as giddy as Charlie still was after the ride...

Having been on the launch of the bike, I reckoned that the R1 would

make a cracking road bike. Others disagreed, but I couldn't agree with me more! It's ace on the road – like a polite Panigale. It feels slim, agile and able to do anything you'd ever want on it. True, the motor is a bit lightweight down low, meaning that you've got to work the gearbox a bit more, but that's all part of the engagement of a machine. I want more inputs, and at the end of the day I don't want to be riding an automatic.

I doesn't feel stupidly fast, either. It probably is, in fact I know it is, but thanks to the control it exudes the world goes by in slow motion – that's quite an achievement. You've probably read about how enthusiastically I rode the Kawasaki H2 one late Sunday evening. Well, that was to drop the bike off with Al where I then swapped it for the R1. If anything, it took me less time to get back...

I managed to sneak onto Llandow for a session, too. In such a confined space the Yamaha barely got out of third gear but even so the electronic armoury came to the fore. There's so much to fiddle with, but I managed to resist




Price from new:
Insurance group: 17

£14,999

touching everything apart from turning the LIF anti-wheelie system off. I find this sort of intrusion morally repugnant, but at least it can get turned off (and it stays off too with the R1 remembering your preferred settings – others take note) to spice up the action – all while retaining the benefits of the sublime TC system.

Llandow is a funny old track, and I found the suspension to be on the soft side there, but it works beautifully on the road, offering a brilliant balance fore and aft. I'll fiddle, at least for fiddling's sake, and then hone from there.

It's been out in the rain, too. This means that it's had a clean where I can report it's much easier to do compared with the old model with all its nooks and crannies. What's not to love! 



As BMW's big wigs intended...



BENJAMIN BMW S 1000 RR SPORT

TIME ON TEST:
2 MONTHS

04106

ODOMETER
MILES

BHP: NA
GAIN: NA

NEXT AIM:
STICK BITS ON!

THIS MONTH I HAVE MOSTLY BEEN... "Going way, way too fast..."

Forty Two. Yep, that number made famous by Douglas Adams is in my mind (and eyes) a lot right now. However, in my case it isn't the answer to meaning of life, the universe and everything. Nope, that's the mpg figure the S 1000 RR has been returning.

Having spent a huge amount of time and miles on her this month, she's been used and abused in many different ways; from long motorway blasts, commuting and trackdays. Yet that number stays stuck there. Funnily enough, when I ran an S 1000 R last year, it was the same on that, too. That's German consistency for you!

Speaking of other numbers, you may have noticed the mileage counter last issue read zero miles. It has actually seen a fair few miles under some hefty bums before I got it, and had just over 3,000 miles showing. I've now stuck over a thousand more on her in the last four weeks, so we've got to know each other almost intimately.

I've also received the owners manual, so have begun to delve through it to find

what I need to do to set it up the way I like on the 'user' mode. However, it says the bike needs a little plug thingy, which sticks in somewhere under the seat. It may already be there, I'm going to check for next month. In the manual it says that activating this may de-homologate the bike for road use, which obviously wouldn't be a good thing. I'll do more research on that, and for the moment am happy to leave it in 'slick' mode even if the suspension can get a little harsh on some of the roads around here.

Much like the S 1000 R last year, a rapid series of jolts on the stiffest setting seem to confound it a bit, meaning it essentially freezes momentarily. Use any of the lower settings and the electronic brain controlling the suspension settings works beautifully to smooth things out. It's only on 'Slick' mode that I get this problem. And on track, as I found out this month, that setting is mega whether fast or slow.

BMW has made real improvements to the active damping since last year's HP4. I also took it around Llandow when we did a test there, and good god the thing is



Price from new: £14,760
Insurance group: 17

quick down the small straights, nudging 140mph on the speedo, which at that place has your eyes popping out of your skull. Good thing the brakes are mega!

I did want to get it on the dyno this issue, but have run out of time. I also wanted to fit some crash protection too. BMW kindly sent me some, except what arrived was two sets of fork/spindle protectors and one side of engine-case protection. This is from their official accessories line, so I'll send one set of the bobbins back and as soon as I get the other side for the engine, they'll go on.

In the meantime, it's more riding and more miles to be done. I love the way I fit on it. On Yamaha's new R1 it's like I'm straddling a minimoto, but the BMW is just right. Much more next month. **FB**



Outdoor sex...

ROOTSY DUCATI PANIGALE 899

TIME ON TEST:
1 MONTH

01251 ODOMETER
MILES

BHP: TBA
GAIN: NA

NEXT AIM:
BLAG BITS

THIS MONTH I HAVE MOSTLY BEEN... "Ironing out some teething troubles..."



If there's one thing I hate, it's taking a bike fresh from its wrapper and running it in the rain as its first task. Sadly, that was the fate of the Ducati Panigale 899 that Ducati has foolishly loaned us until the leaves start falling again. I won't lie, we were hankering after the 1299, especially after BJ came back from the launch raving about it and its clever ways. But after spending the day on one in North Wales last month, I've got a feeling that the bigger bike would be more trouble than it's worth.

I love Ducati's smaller sportsbikes. I can remember having an absolute blast on a 748 in the middle of France a dozen years ago, I actually liked the 749 when it was released, and I thought that the 848 eventually matured into a stunning superbike. And the 899 Panigale just follows in its forefathers' footsteps. I genuinely feel that it's a better bike on the road the big 'un – where this machine will spend 90 per cent of its time. And the other ten per cent? It's not like the 899 is incapable of track work, as wholeheartedly proved by the 30 bikes circulating in the TriOptions Cup at selected rounds of BSB in healthy fashion.

I'd actually done a bit of forward planning and in between launches, meetings and bank holidays, I saw the opportunity to take the Ducati up north to

our HQ, but that required taking it home tonight. So on fresh tyres and lavished with polish, the Ducati rumbled out onto wet Wiltshire roads, undoing all the good work that had been undertaken back at Ducati's Silverstone base.


I literally jumped on the bike and left, and before long I wished that I'd taken 20 minutes to sort the bike to suit. I quickly found that the gear shift and rear brake lever were both set way too high for me – with the brake pedal in particular meaning that it looked like I was having a good old fashioned cockney knees up whenever I wanted to slow. The gearshift, like on so many Ducatis, needs a good hoof to engage each cog, so I need to learn to be more positive in this department to get my money's worth from the quickshifter. The levers aren't quite in my perfect place either, so it wasn't the most natural start for our partnership.

And the brakes aren't as sharp as I remember them. I'm a two-finger braking man, always have been, but employing only these digits quickly resulted in a panicked switch to all four. The first action of the brakes really doesn't return very much, and only as you go deeper into the lever's action do you get the sort of power the Brembos are renowned for. The brake fluid is darker than I'd expect, so perhaps the air's been at it.



Price from new: £12,795
Insurance group: 17

Moans over, I just got on and rode the thing, and what a beauty she is. Electronic suspension, autoblipper, wheelie control? You can shove it all. The 899 still possesses a decent armoury of electronics, but the Showa Big Piston forks and Sachs shock are more than capable of controlling the 899's output.

Plans? There's a set of carbon wheels lying about from BJ's Pani of last year that I think will fit, an aftermarket Aka would be sweet and then a tidier tail is all on the cards. Get that done quickly, then I'll see what else I can cajole out of Ducati. But first up, it needs a clean... 



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Can someone pass the ketamine for Charlie please...



CHARLIE TRIUMPH DAYTONA 675

TIME ON TEST:
1 MONTH (FBK302)

01700

ODOMETER
MILES

BHP: 115
GAIN: N/A

NEXT AIM:
TRACK TIME

THIS MONTH I HAVE MOSTLY BEEN... "Excited. I mean REALLY excited..."

In 2009 I had a decision to make, a supersport purchase was to be made and it was a real toss up between a 675 Daytona and a Kawasaki ZX-6R. In the end I went for the Kawasaki, but ever since I've always wondered if this was the right decision.

That same year the Kawasaki came fourth in our annual Sports Bike of the Year test, which made me a very proud owner indeed. But the Daytona had come third and although there was not a huge amount in it, it got me wondering. I have ridden the 675 since, though spent more time on the 675R, but have lived with neither for a long period.

Six years is a longtime and the ZX-6R has since departed my garage (more is the pity) and my personal bike experience and abilities have improved. As, of course, has the Daytona, which still sees it positioned as best in class. In issue 299 this model gave the GSX-R750 a spanking in the middleweights test at Anglesey, accused as it was of 'cheating' because it is just so darned good. With a 10/10 from AI and a 9/10 from Beej there is praise indeed from the seasoned testers, and though my name is on the sheet for the 675, I already know it's on a shared basis...

No sooner than I had run the 675 down the ramp off the van at FB HQ the keys were passed over to Rootsy. With a limited number of bikes in store at the time and the MT still in full commission it was only fair for the Guv'nor to take it for what I thought was a couple of days.

A frustrating week passed before I saw it again in a scenario you could liken to Edmund Blackadder's 'Thank you young crone, here is a purse of monies... which I am not going to give to you' type moment. When I finally took ownership the bike was 1,000 miles old, Rootsy had some fun for sure doubling the 500 miles that Triumph had broken her in with.

My first outing was a genuine revelation. True, I am usually a little edgy when first jumping on a new bike, but not with the Daytona. Everything just gelled straight away. Take three left hand turns out of our office and there's an off camber roundabout that I sailed round three times before taking the necessary turn, I was just revelling in the feel, the handling and the overwhelming sense of wanting to make my journey home as long as it could be.

Going from the MT to the 675 could not have been more different. If this was Carry on Fast Bikes, I've just left being Sid James's wingman, full of innuendo, lurid comments and arse slapping to gently wooing the ladies with the confident determination and smooth charm of Leslie Phillips.

The Daytona glides across the streets with a hidden aggression that is easily released with a twist of the throttle that delivers pace and an unearthly growl from the three pot engine. In essence it sounds good, looks good and rides so well that I am going to spend a lot of time this year being stumped on how to improve it. I promise I will do my best.



Price from new: £9,599
Insurance group: 15

So I have the Triumph catalogue open in front of me and am looking at what to do. I have also been playing with the 'Build your own Triumph' feature on the official website. Here you can choose your modifications and have them virtually fitted to your bike on screen, showing you how the bike's look will change whilst keeping a running tally, too. This is good in case you get a little over excited with your budget. A must is crash protection, of course, and there's the obvious temptation to bling the pipe, which should release a few more ponies. But this year I may have to delve a little deeper to find outright improvement on what is already a great package.

So all in, it's going to be quite a summer. If the 700 miles I've done in three weeks is any indication I think that an apology will be necessary to Triumph for returning the Daytona with such high mileage. But then that's what we do, so you can look forward to many a roadside pic of the Daytona across the UK as I find more and more reasons to cover vast distances. I currently have a hankering to hear Bagpipes. Is there anyone in Scotland that needs a jar lid loosening, because if so, I'm your man! **LB**

I give you Llandow with its magnificent vistas to your left...



ROOTSY KTM RC390

TIME ON TEST:
3 MONTHS

01611 ODOMETER
MILES

BHP: 35
GAIN: NA

NEXT AIM:
NEW SHOCK

THIS MONTH I HAVE MOSTLY BEEN... "Taking to the track..."

I finally had a chance to run the little RC390 on track this month. It was for a little feature we'll be running in a few months time, and it was up against a rather special adversary – David and Goliath had nothing on this.

The KTM held its head high, although not without a few issues. The last time I'd been out on track with it was on the launch when my confidence was riding sky high and the little circuit near Modena was sunbaked and grippy. That meant that I went bananas on it, basically because I could. Launches are a good time to do this, mainly because any excess that may leak out into the gravel traps is not on our insurance. I'm not saying that I was wanting to crash, I'd never want to do that, but I got to explore the limits alright.

But back in Blighty I'd get a rocket up my arse if I managed to bin another one, so my pace on track was tempered by the thought of the paperwork, reports, and other H&S bollocks associated with a crash at work. But I was still going quick enough

to realise that the bike's poor springs don't like massive lean angles – or maybe it's me it's not keen on.


It should like a lean, because of its size and weight, but in getting the bike to under £5,000 a few compromises were made – the suspension being the most obvious. The front doesn't have the plush feeling you associate with bigger bikes, where there's no reason why it shouldn't, while the rear feels even more basic. That means that the Metzeler rubber takes a bit of a beating, and you're asking a lot of it on track, especially when feedback isn't that great the faster you go.

Power and dynamics-wise, I was impressed with what the RC offered. It's better than the rice-pudding-skin-puller that you expect, and once you get into a rhythm it provides enough acceleration to make you think about big braking come the next corner. Braking markers were much later than on the naked we tested earlier in the day at Llandow, to the point that at the end of the back straight (the one with



Price from new: £4,998
Insurance group: 9

the scary wall of tyres behind it), all the KTM needed was a quick squeeze just before tipping it in. At the end of the front straight the bike braked well enough for a single caliper jobbie, and the ABS wasn't cutting in at all – which is more than can be said for some of the bigger bikes ridden earlier.

Perhaps because you're not circulating round at stupid speeds you feel that you can concentrate on your inputs. Braking and turn-in points can be really honed-in on because you're not approaching them at a billion miles an hour, which I really appreciate. Going banzai fast is all well and good, but that doesn't necessarily turn you into a better rider. The RC390, on the other hand, certainly can. 

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PETER SUZUKI GSX-R1000

TIME ON TEST:
1 MONTH (FBK303)

01009

ODOMETER
MILES

BHP: NA
GAIN: NA

NEXT AIM:
STAY ALIVE?

THIS MONTH I HAVE MOSTLY BEEN... "Doing 170mph - legally!"

So the V-Strom has sadly gone back to Suzuki, but don't feel too sorry for me as they've swapped it for a brand new GSX-R1000!

Due to issues with busy calendars on everyone's part, we'd been having a few dilemmas getting the bikes swapped so the FB boys looked after her at their top secret fortified HQ until I could get up to them. The only gap I had in the next month or two was on the way up to catch the ferry for the Isle of Man TT races, so this got pencilled in. I stopped off on the Friday to find Benjamin dealing with his little one who was having a bit of a meltdown! I didn't laugh... too much!

He wheeled out the new bike and I was immediately taken with the red and black colour scheme. The traditional '1000' sticker is gone from either side of the pillion seat and the only thing giving the brand away is the GSX-R marking on the fairing and the Suzuki badge on the tank. I think a lot of people would say that the GSX-R design hadn't changed a lot over the years, but I really do think this bike looks the part, and it's had a lot of attention since I've had it.

Normally I like to spend some time finding my feet and getting used to a new bike. This usually involves a chilled ride out taking in a mixture of roads. Those of you that have visited the Isle of Man will know that the national speed limit sign means no speed limit. To say the Gixxer got chucked in the deep end would be putting it lightly; 170mph up

over the mountain road would definitely highlight any deficiencies!

At those kinds of speeds you have to feel comfortable with the bike and confident in its abilities. That is exactly what this bike does; it allows you to jump on and ride as fast or as slow as you like whilst making it an enjoyable experience. The BPF forks have been used again (as they are on the GSX-R750) and I had forgotten how much I loved them. They're a bit stiff over the bumpier stuff but mid-corner is where they shine; giving the front end a solid, planted feel. The bike comes with OEM Bridgestone S20's which are fine and, combined with the forks, provide enough feedback to allow you to have fun - although I'd love to try some stickier rubber.

The standard bike now comes with a Yoshimura end-can which is stunning looking and superbly crafted. This sounds good with the baffle in, making it practical for everyday riding. With the baffle out it really screams at higher revs whilst popping and banging on the over-run - I love it! The Brembo brakes are also pretty good too. I had said that the calipers on the GSX-R750 and the 'Busa were a bit underwhelming, but that isn't the case on this bike. They have decent initial bite and can shed speed quickly when you're braking hard. I gave them a good workout and even with standard pads, they didn't fade once. Right, one more trip over the mountain I think!

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Price from new: £10,999
Insurance group: 15



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PIC: KEL EDGE

Chaz and Dave are riding their balls off to stay near the Kawasaki duo of Rea and Sykes...



WIN WITH TWINS?

The more we watch Ducati trying to turn its 1,199cc v-twin Panigale into a contender, the more we wonder how long the firm will stick with the two-cylinder format for racing. Any who bemoan the extra capacity over the four-cylinder brigade simply doesn't understand engines. When Ducati were running 999cc motors they could be competitive under the old superbikes rules, but at a huge cost. That cost was up to four engines per weekend, whereas the others used just one. Over a long season, you don't need to be Einstein to figure out that's a huge amount of motors, more than 50 if there's more than a dozen rounds.

The agreement to give Ducati, and any others running twins, up to 1200cc wasn't to help them bridge the performance gap so much as to reduce the number of engines they needed and drastically reduce the cost. Yes, they had a torque advantage, and were restricted via other ways (such as airflow), but it became obvious pretty soon that even without the restrictions they were struggling to keep up. As the four-cylinders became even more powerful and sophisticated, Ducati looked to a new philosophy with the Panigale line. High and fast revving, this was supposed to match the searing top end of the competition. But over the last three years it's clear this isn't enough, the Ducatis are still slower and now they have no corner exit advantage as peak torque is made far further up the rev range.

To make matters even worse, modern electronics and mapping means that a four-

cylinder is essentially a twin on the side of the tyre, a triple on the shoulder of the tyre and a full-blown four in a straight line. The Ducati's twin is still just a twin everywhere, there's no advantage anywhere (bar maybe corner entry), while the fours have the best of all worlds at any point.

How much longer will Ducati let this go on? The fact is that even with 199cc more than the others, the architecture of the twin restricts Ducati massively – and the competition is only going to get faster. Ducati's race supremo, Gigi Dall'Igna, subtly hinted at Imola that the WSB future might lay with more than two cylinders. Ducati already races a v-four in MotoGP and made a replica road machine, so there's your precedent. It also wouldn't mean that Ducati would have to abandon its v-twin based ethos for its road bikes, either.

But something has to give eventually. Both Chaz Davies and his team-mate Davide Guigliano are good enough to vie for the world title, yet the pair have struggled with the deficiencies of the Panigale for nearly two years. Now in its third year of competition, this simply can't be acceptable for neither them, nor Ducati, much longer. Plus we'd just love to see what they'd come up with if the Bolognian firm went for a V-four, for example. As it's Ducati, even if it was a relatively limited run each one would sell within minutes, but they'd finally have the chance to get back at the front in proddy racing, and Chaz et al wouldn't have to ride over and beyond the limit every race just to keep that famous moniker in the game.



Pit Pass

ULTIMATE ACCESS TO THE WORLD'S RACE PODOCKS, RACERS & TEAMS

It's been an up and down season...



ABSOLUTION GAP

'Mind the gap' is a phrase oft used in all kinds of sports where a points based system is used. Quite often the story of a season is entrenched in these 'gaps' between one rider and another, or a whole bunch of others. It's also fascinating to see what both losing or gaining a lead does to a rider's head. Take last year in WSB with Tom Sykes, watching his big lead get whittled down after such an impressive start to the year to eventually lose the title at the final race in Qatar. But then in 2015 there's Jonny Rea, and his gap to the chasing pack is cavernous in the extreme. It's the kind of gap that saps the will of those chasing him. At time of writing he has a 124-point lead over second place. So he could crash out of the next four races yet still lead the series one point shy of a race win. It'd take an extreme amount of

bad luck for him to lose the title now. He could finish second or third for the rest of the year and, for him, cruise to his first WSB title victory.

Over in MotoGP, it's been a different story with the points gap. Valentino Rossi, who continues to defy all expectations of him, was sitting on a nice and healthy points gap after the first few races. Jorge Lorenzo was out to lunch, Marc Marquez's Honda wasn't playing ball and Dani Pedrosa's hurt arm kept him out for three rounds. The only man to keep near him on the table was Andrea Dovizioso on the resurgent new Ducati. Vale's fans were beside themselves with joy, a swansong title looked to be on the cards. Then Lorenzo woke up...

Jorge won three in a row, and as the series moves to Catalunya Rossi's lead is a slender six

points, and from the outside it has seemed that it's got to Rossi a little bit. In fact, at Mugello, he wouldn't have even been on the podium had Marquez not crashed out, nor Dovizioso retired.

He's sat watching that gap diminish over the last few rounds and while we're sure he's up for a fight, considering Lorenzo's astonishing speed the doubt must be creeping in. Were it just Jorge to contend with he could probably handle it, but everyone else is getting faster. And more worrying, Marquez and Honda are firmly on the back foot. Marc's gap to the top is currently 50 points, but there are more than enough races left for him to overhaul everyone come season end. So even while he's down in the dumps at the minute, that's one gap we can never assume he's unable to bridge.

RACING LINES

Marco Melandri

Yes, our favourite moody Italian racer and his saga rumbles on. At time of writing, still no decision has been made on his future, but it looks as though he may leave MotoGP and end his nightmare soon. Unless Aprilia are feeling cruel, and force him to continue his misery...

Ratthapark Wilairot

A true case of watching your words, Ratthapark has talked himself right out of a ride. Even though he won a race, speaking of your dislike for your team's main sponsor in a newspaper is only ever going to cause you grief. Which it did, as they sacked him immediately. Oops...

PJ Jacobsen

Wilairot's loss is the American's gain, as he took the vacant seat in the Core Honda team after PJ's team boss went missing in mysterious circumstances. Jacobsen stuck it on the podium on his first ride on the Honda mind you, so every cloud, and all that.

Kyle Ryde

The young British Supersport charger turned heads at Donny's WSB round, by parking third on the podium after scrapping with Kenan Sofuoglu and Jules Cluzel. The boy stuck himself firmly in the shop window, so expect a transition to the world series soon (we hope). Well done dude!

Vittorio Iannuzzo

After kicking his heels and doing the odd BSB Supersport round, Vittorio should be lining up at Snetterton on his MV Agusta F4 RC in BSB, adding impressively another manufacturer to the roster. Now that we're done ragging the RC, he can finally have his race bike. You're welcome, Vittorio, and thanks for the lend!

Danny Kent

The man is still on it, still leading the Moto3 series and when he's not winning he's bagging consistent points, enough to ensure he stays in front. The dream of finally being a British GP champion is in his hands. C'mon Danny!

HONDA GETS A DOSE

When Cal Crutchlow signed to ride for the LCR Honda team, he was like a cat that had got the cream. When Scott Redding learned he would also be on a semi-factory RCV, he too began to dream of what could be. Now, just a handful of races into the new season, those dreams have turned into nightmares. And the blame lies squarely with Honda, via the unbelievably talented Marc Marquez. It's a syndrome we've seen many times before, we like to call it 'Winner's Complacency Syndrome', or WCS for short. Back in the early 1990s, Wayne Rainey kept winning on his Yamaha YZR500, three titles on the trot. However, after the first one he complained bitterly about the YZR, and kept saying how it wasn't right. But Yamaha didn't seem to respond, leading his then boss Kenny Roberts to tell Wayne, "How can you expect them to change anything if you keep winning?" But the bike wasn't right, and ignoring Rainey meant that for years afterwards the YZR was playing catch up. Then there was Casey Stoner on the Ducati. He made it look great, while it broke other riders' careers one after another. He told Ducati it needed work, but while still winning, they didn't listen and we all know what happened when Rossi got on it. Now it appears Honda has a bad case of WCS. The RCV isn't right, that much is clear, most of their riders are crashing their brains out losing the front. Honda's error is affecting satellite and factory riders alike, and if they don't sort it out soon any chance of Marquez making it three in a row will go right out of the window. In fact, the only cure for WCS, is a rival winning a title. A cure that will come for too late for Marquez and HRC.



Rainey on his way to turning the number two plate into the number one...

NAKED LEGENDS

Here's an idea for you, how about a special racing series on naked sportsbikes, but with legends on board? This would be to run with the WSB series, of course. For some time we've thought there must be a place for naked in racing, even if there's a large disparity between performance with some models. But wait, there's a fix for that too, and we only have to dive back into time to another race series, the Pro Am, for the answer. So, the gist would be that a regular set of racing legends, be that the Gardners, Doohans, Foggys, Niall Mackenzie types and so on, would race at each round of WSB on a Saturday and a Sunday. Any manufacturer present in WSB would be obliged to provide at least two bikes from their naked ranges set up for track, much like the current Superstock rules, which would keep it cheap. Said legends would then blindly pick keys from a hat on a Friday morning so there's an element of chance involved. If they pick the same manufacturer they had at the previous round, the key goes back in and they pick another. So, one weekend they could be racing a Kawasaki Z1000 or Triumph Speed Triple, the next an Aprilia Tuono or BMW S 1000 R. It works on many levels – we get to see these awesome naked in action, but also stars from the past too. And there could be several slots for any local legends free each round, thereby widening the interest to those attending the racing. Get a big sponsor involved for a bit of prize money and maybe also involve a charity too, and it could be a go-er. So, who'd like to see stars of the past mashing it up again? We would!



The series has started already...

MOLE: ON SHIFT GOINGS ON


Pit Shadow

■ The news that hit just prior to Portimao's WSB races about the team owner of the Intermoto Pony Express Kawasaki, Josef Kubicek, going missing is just one of a long line of incidents that have happened over the years. And a lot of them seem to happen in Superbike paddocks. I know shenanigans happen in the MotoGP paddock too, but they tend to get quashed before anything leaks out. But in WSB there's been a few and this is just the latest example. As he was the team owner all his assets were seized by the Czech police while they try to locate him. This meant Aiden Wagner, Lucas Mathias and PJ Jacobsen were suddenly left high and dry. PJ went and scored another ride and did quite well, but the other two are perfecting their CVs while the cops continue to search for their old boss.

Now, I hope he's OK, but when it comes to racing my suspicions are always automatically raised. After all we've had the guns and drugs scandal which rocked the Paul Bird Squad a few years ago. Poor old Birdy looked shell-shocked throughout most of the palaver, understandably so. Before that we saw the Sergio Bertocchi race truck hijack situation.

Which leads me to a more delicate matter that has plagued racing behind the scenes for years, and that's drugs in motorcycle sport. Now, I'm not talking about riders here, rather how their rides have come about. There are enough whispered stories of young MotoGP and superbike series racers, and how their rise to the top was funded by a loving 'uncle' or someone else part of, or close to, the family. Families that, with the greatest of respect, don't have huge amounts of money yet somebody managed to put their rising star through some seriously expensive rungs to get them to the top. In fairness, there are plenty of parents and family friends who do things the right way, the hard but legitimate way. The dodgy 'others' are still there though, few in number perhaps, but there nonetheless.

Yet it's not just individuals I'm talking about here, rather whole teams too, all funded by what would be considered nefarious means by anybody respectable. For people like me, and general journalists involved in the sport though, it's something we tend to not look into too much. You'd have a hard time proving it for starters – these people aren't stupid after all. But not just that, there are livelihoods at stake, jobs, kids and mortgages. Much like the Intermoto team in fact, whose staff and riders have been left high and dry – and without an income following the perplexing vanishing of Mr Kubicek. But I digress...

You may think I'm crazy, but I'm not. This is happening in race paddocks the world over, at all levels. And why do you ask? Well, conveniently, racing in money terms is one massive black hole. Cash just vanishes when you're racing, ask even any club racer that and they'll agree. It's a perfect venue for disposing of large amounts of money, much like other motorised sports and, thus, it attracts a few wolves to bed themselves amongst the flock. It's a shame really, it makes a mockery of all the hard work and effort many make so they can go racing year in and out. One thing I have noticed, however, is that top teams are clean as a whistle. They have to be, there's too much exposure and too much rival attention for anything sketchy to be going down. Will it ever end though? I doubt it... 

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The R1, in endurance form (left), BSB (below), European Superstock (top) and IDM (above)

NO R'SING ABOUT RETURN OF THE ONE?

Yamaha aims to make a big splash in the 2016 World Superbike paddock. Can the new R1 be competitive 'straight out the crate' in the big boy's league?

WORDS: KENNY PRYDE PICS: YAMAHA & GEE BEE IMAGES

It wasn't that long ago that the Yamaha R1 was a title winner in both the World, British and American Superbike championships. Remember? Ben Spies in his rookie WSB year in 2009 and in BSB with Leon Camier that same year. However, when Yamaha pulled out at the end of 2011, nobody was expecting to see the Iwata massive park its battle buses back in the WSB paddock any time soon for a variety of reasons.

The lingering financial crisis in Japan, allied to the global downturn and Italy's economy being flushed down the gabbetto, all put big money pressures on Yamaha's World Superbike and Supersport efforts. When Italian backer Sterilgarda withdrew its title sponsorship of the essentially Italian team,



The masses gather, ready for the assault...



COGHLAN GOING FRENCH

Having raced for years in Spain, winning the Spanish Supersport title and then racing in both in Moto2 and in World Supersport, Kev Coghlan finds himself on the new French-based MRS Yamaha R1M in 2015.

The Scot first threw his leg over the bike a few days before Christmas, at the Alcarràs circuit. "I think it was six degrees after the fog cleared, it would have been warmer at Knockhill," chuckled Coghlan. "I rode a stock road bike, it still had lights, stock suspension and the exhaust on it – though they had taken the indicators off and I thought, 'My god, what are they doing building these things for the

road!?' It already felt like a race bike out the box – just with lights on it."

Coghlan, like the BSB team, is quick to point out how nimble and quick-handling the bike is and how smooth the power delivery is. "We're working on the electronics at the moment, that's the area we're concentrating on most. In stock trim, for a trackday rider, the electronics are amazing, pretty much anyone can jump on it and go fast and get it spinning up, it gives you loads of confidence to open the gas early. It's like flash cars, it doesn't really stop the tyre spinning up, it gets it sliding then holds it there and it's not really obvious when



the traction control is cutting in – it just makes you feel like you're a really good rider," laughed Coghlan.

With experienced team boss Adrien Morillas ("he's out on the track watching and is really good at picking up wee things to help") and Yamaha Germany behind the French team, there's a determination inside the squad that should lead to a victory before the end of the season, which would be an impressive start for a brand-new bike. There aren't many Superstock teams testing between rounds (as MRS did at Almeria between Donington and Portimao), which is clear evidence of the resources being put into the team. There no fewer than four Yamaha Italy engineers and Yamaha WSB/MotoGP old hand Andrea Dosoli has been on hand at every round and test to help with developing the bike. Even at Superstock level, Yamaha is leaving little to chance with its new R1M baby.



Hi, I'm Kev, I like racing motorbikes, watching films, taking walks in the park...

Team orders? Pull wheelies!



Meanwhile, in Germany...

the jig was up, because you need big money to make superbikes go fast.

In fact, the 2009-2014 bike needed a lot of work, money and expertise to make it competitive. The inescapable truth was that the 2009-spec R1 in stock trim was far from a racing whippet, rather it was a bit on the lardy side and sluggish compared to its rivals.

Things had got worse with arrival and refinement of the BMW S 1000 RR, Kawasaki ZX-10R and Aprilia RSV4 – both in full-spec Superbike and Superstock racing – all of which meant that Yamaha had to take some time out, get back to the drawing board, go on a diet and get really serious with the 2015 model YZF-R1M.

Which brings us, more or less, to today. Yamaha is on the way back into World Superbike racing and is already in Superstock and looking strong in its early outings. In the UK, the Milwaukee Yamaha team – related, in many ways to the winning Swan Yamaha squad of 2009-12 – is campaigning with the new R1. Add to those rolling test-beds the efforts in the German Superbike series with Damian Cudlin and Max Neukirchner (where it's already won) and in Japan with a factory-backed effort in the All-Japan series and its clear Yamaha isn't sneaking back to WSB in 2016 just to make up the numbers.

We asked people who should know, people who are currently refining and working on the 2015 bike in various championships in preparation for the big come back to WSB in

Brookes with his hands on a trophy already...





It's already flying in BSB

2016. Will the bike be able to win first time out in World Superbikes in 2016?

In British Superbikes the Milwaukee Yamaha team is one of the teams running the new R1 in superbike trim, even if the British rules aren't quite the same as in World Superbikes. We asked team manager Mick Shanley to explain the main differences between the previous Swan Yamaha R1 and the current machine. There was a pause.

"The main difference? It's every last nut and bolt!" was Shanley's succinct reply, "They don't really share any common parts whatsoever." He then added, "the frame and engine are completely different, it's a lot lighter and a lot smaller and it's got a lot more power," which pretty much backs up his assertion. "The engine alone is almost eight kilos lighter than the previous model."

Which, for a race team, is both refreshing and a major challenge because when a bike is so completely new, your data and reference points from the previous seasons aren't going to be much use. "We got our first bike in a crate the day the bike was launched to the press at the Milan show (November 3rd - Ed.) and it was completely pre-production, it had mis-matched panels on it and the chassis number just said 'Sample.' It was just a pre-production unit," laughs Shanley, as if to

emphasise both the 'freshness' of the bike and the size of the task facing him and other Yamaha teams around the world. "The first thing we did was measure it up and get some engine and bike stands made up so as we could work on it, but for the first couple of months we didn't do much, we dyno'd it and got some baseline data and had a think."

Shanley has been working on race bikes for more seasons than he'd care to remember, from Hondas in Grand Prix and all stations in between, but he seems excited by the new R1M. The word 'potential' comes up over and over. It turns out that in the opening rounds of the British Superbike championship, the R1 was running in a very low state of engine tune, "Basically stock - we ran a standard engine at the first two rounds," and the power of the new engine is something that clearly excites him.

"The problem with the old bike was that it didn't accelerate out of slow corners that well. Partly that was down to the weight of the bike and partly it was down to the inertia in the engine, it just didn't spin up quickly either. Once it up and running it was fast - if you look at the results from faster, flowing circuits



Das ist gut, ya?

we always performed well. Once the bike was in fourth and fifth gear exits, it was great - look at the results from Thruxton for example - but accelerating out of slower corners, we suffered and that was quite evident. With this bike's engine characteristics we've definitely gained a lot of the acceleration we were previously missing."

Yamaha Japan is so keen and so serious when it comes to racing this R1, that it has entrusted the European end of the development to the oversight of Yamaha Motor Europe, specifically the Racing Development Division run by Markus Eschenbacher. Of all the people involved in turning base road bike metal into superbike gold, the name of Eschenbacher is often cited. The German was Cal Crutchlow's crew chief in both Supersport and Superbike and he was with Eugene Laverty when the Irishman was winning on the R1 too.

It turns out that Eschenbacher is currently working on the 2016 superbike, collating data and feedback from the teams racing the bike in various championships around the world. Markus is at the heart of the engine tuning, electronics and set-up magic, but he's also playing his cards close to his chest, as you'd expect of an engineering boffin working closely with a Japanese factory.

"Our backing now comes from Yamaha Motor Europe, rather than the UK, so we are working really closely with Yamaha now, a lot more closely than what we ever have done before and basically our job is to help them develop the bike," adds Shanley, "we're an officially supported Yamaha team, which is one step down from full factory backing." 🍷

And not a single bum pinched in jest, impressive!





Suzuka will offer a benchmark in development

In practice, for Milwaukee and other teams of similar stature, this means that, "Yamaha is developing a lot of the race parts for the bike for all the teams, which are all running more or less the same parts – Akrapovic exhaust systems, obviously, and we are all running Öhlins suspension and all the teams are all on MoTec electronics and Pirelli tyres too. It's early though and at the moment we're all focused on really understanding the standard production bike before deciding which direction to move in."

With the same parts and platform being used across several teams, there's no doubt that Yamaha is very serious about making sure the investment it has made in the R1 pays off. "Do I think the new R1 will be capable of winning in World Superbikes in 2016? Well, let's just say that there's no way that Yamaha is going to go back into the World Superbike championship unless it thinks it can win," stated Shanley, "It's going there to win. The focus is on the slightly longer term – not just the next race – and the potential for the bike is just incredible. As a race bike, there's a lot more to come."

With the Milwaukee Yamaha R1M on the podium in the first two British superbike races 'in a very early stage of development' – it was racing with a standard fuel tank position, standard engine, standard rear shock linkage, standard swingarm, standard gearbox and standard clutch with standard springs for two rounds – then the signs are that the bike will be a force in whatever superbike championship it's in. If I was a betting man, I might stick a few Euros on it for 2016... **FB**

The French GMT squad is a rolling development team...

SUZUKA 8-HOUR EFFORT (JULY 23 TO 26TH)

As if to emphasise the seriousness of Yamaha's approach to racing the new R1 in the superbike class, this is the first time for years that the factory has backed a team in the All-Japan Superbike championship with Katsuyuki Nakasuga, who will partner Tech3 MotoGP riders Bradley Smith and Pol Espargaro at the Suzuki 8-Hour Endurance race on a bike heavily-based on the one raced by Nakasuga in the All-Japan series. It's safe to assume it's a full factory effort then...



Another step forward in the R1's quest for world domination...

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Brands Hatch



Clive Padgett

The first TT supersport race is about an hour away, but I gather your printer is screaming at you for some words from me! It's the Monday of race week here on the Isle of Man, and we're very happy at the moment. That's as Bruce Anstey won the superbike race for us yesterday! I think he should keep the beard; that's why I'm removing any cutting implements from him! His girlfriend loves it, which is why I think it's still there. Frankly, I wouldn't care if he had two heads – he rides a motorbike fast. He could be bald, shaved, it doesn't matter as it won't affect his right wrist, will it? What a superb man; both as a person and a motorcycle racer.

But, of course, we did go to the North West 200 before the TT. The weather was the major issue there, as it has been for a couple of years now. We were never sure if we were going to be racing or not, and the superbike race was cancelled in the end. But Bruce kept his record of straight NW200 podiums on the go, it's 14 years now! The same as his TT record too, as it goes. Anyway, Bruce went well in the first superbike race, and was only half a second away from winning it. He thought he had a chance, but said it was too windy to pass the guys. Trying a move was going to be too dangerous, but being so close to Hutchy and Seeley gave him a load of confidence for the TT. Young Dan Kneen also shone too. No podiums, it's true, but we were happy with his overall pace.

The NW200 is a great event to prepare for the TT, yet

there's a huge amount of work to get ready for it, and there's lots to do when you're there. But it gets the guys up to racing at 200mph – and we get ready as a team. It's a great event to be a part of, so overall it's worth it. The organisers put so much effort into it, and long may that go on. Bruce loves it there, which is a good thing.

We're now at the TT. Aside from some weather issues we had a good practice week, with Bruce in the top two in most sessions. He actually only did one lap in one session on the superbike, came in and told me he was ready and he didn't want to wear them out! I think he wanted a nap, he likes to conserve his energy rather than drain it!

The superbike race was ace, he was close to Hutchy at the start, but he tends to get faster and faster as the race goes on. He knew he was going to get quicker and he took the lead and went on to win. And he broke the race record too, which makes us happy as we've had to use a different spec' engine this year. Plus, Dan did really well. He was running in sixth, but as the race got red flagged the way they take it back meant he was seventh. It was unfortunate really, he wasn't far from home, but I think he did really well. We're going to enjoy helping Dan develop, he's a great kid.

Everyone asked me what I think of the Michael Dunlop and Yamaha thing. Well, I'm a man who if I shake someone's hand I like to honour the deal. But as I've been a racer myself I know you want to be competitive. Michael wants to put himself into a position to win, I understand that. The Yamaha is a great bike, it'll certainly get there in the end, but he wants to get back on something he knows and understands. Sitting on the fence is the way to approach this I think, as it's tough for all involved. And I'm not knocking Yamaha, we raced with them for years, my Dad won TTs with them, it's a fantastic product, and it's doing great on short circuits right now. But the roads are so different with the speeds maintained for so long.

I've also been asked about John McGuinness a few times and why he's not with us. It's a sponsor issue that led to him riding for a different team. So we didn't close the door on him, John's one of my closest personal friends. There's nothing negative in what happened at all, and who knows, maybe he'll ride for us again one day...

So we've got a supersport race later today, and things are boding well. But the Island does throw up some crazy variables. You could have a stone chip up and hole a radiator, you just don't know. We're just refreshing the engines for the superbikes in the back of truck right now too, so I've got to run. But before I do, I just want to say how much fun we're all having. If you want success, you work hard, and we're all hard workers. My missus rang me and said, "You need a couple of days off next week love." Maybe! I think she wants a bit of TLC herself, which is fair enough, I love all my family a great deal and they're all on side with the racing. My daughter zoomed off at 7am the other day to pick up some fairings, my other daughter is back at the shop running it. It's the kind of thing you can't buy. The rest of them are fantastic, an incredible bunch, I'm grateful for every single one of them – we couldn't do this without you all, thank you!

What racing is all about...



Gary Johnson

It's TT time and I'm loving life! What a mega place this is, made all the better by a pretty good week of practice. The weather's been a tad sketchy, but the organisers have worked hard to get us out on our bikes. You always want more time to get your head around this place, but that's the big challenge here.

It's surprising how different the track can be from one year to the next. You always know where you're going, but the road surface can alter significantly from one year to the next; new Tarmac laid in some places, new potholes appearing in others. Figuring what's where is all part of the fun and that's kept me busy all week. To be fair, the Isle of Man Government's done a mint job of keeping the road in good condition, so everyone's been pretty much up to pace from the first night.

All of my bikes are different to the ones I rode last year, so getting them honed in has taken a bit of time. The GBMoto Kawasaki superbike is awesome, and I've been having a load of fun beasting that around here; it's a proper weapon. Dialling the bike in has been the biggest challenge, but we're getting there.

The North West didn't quite go to plan, but it gave me a good stint of time to get laps in on the bike, and we've carried that data over from the Northern Irish track. The big difference between the two circuits is you perfect your high-speed stability at the North West, then work hard to get the damping right here on the Island.

We've got the opening Superbike race tomorrow and I reckon the ZX-10R is somewhere near where I want it to be. We've had two nights of practice cancelled and I could have done with 'em, to be fair. But it's the same for everyone and it seems a few of us have felt the pinch. That being the case, my other classes have gone pretty sweet.

I've gone fastest in supersport! The Mar-Train R6 is still very new to me, but the team's well experienced and they've made up for my lack of time on the bike. Can I win it? I reckon I'm in

Gaz is having a blast...



with a shout, but we'll have to wait and see. The main thing is that I'm feeling comfortable and pumped for it.

On a similar note, I don't know what the WK boys have been feeding Marty, my Zebra-striped bike, but the CF Moto 650i has been going a right treat. Farquhar just edged me from going fastest on two occasions, but we're both putting 117mph laps in and I know I can push harder when I need to. Bagging a win on that should turn a few heads, and the WK/CF Moto guys are well deserving of a top result. They've pumped some serious time and money into the project. The state of tune is pretty high on all the lightweights and everyone's nervous about the reliability of their bike, but some serious engine development work over winter will hopefully pay dividends when it comes to race time, and there will be no issues with our bike.

The only machine I'm a bit worried about is my stocker. I've not had chance to get out on her yet, but there's talk of the organisers giving us a few additional laps during race week to get some practice in before Monday's race. That'll do me, because otherwise I won't be able to start the race. I'm pretty chuffed with the whole stocker package, but it would be nice to just go for a blast and make sure there are no niggles that need sorting.

Bikes aside, I've been making the most of the TT atmosphere. It blows my mind how many people make their way over to the Island from all over the place. I try to get out and natter to as many folk as I can and hear their take of things. You meet some mega people with some proper funny stories. When things haven't gone so great, the fans can always lift you up and I'm mega grateful for them taking the time to come and find me. It's humbling. Hopefully I'll pay them back for their enthusiasm by doing the business in race week. We'll soon find out.



Two Siblings Racing

Three out of three for Team FB, as they tick off the longest race of the season...

WORDS: BRUCE WILSON
PICS: ALEX JAMES PHOTOGRAPHY

At the previous round we'd learned the old engine was burning oil, so Mark Sadler of Go Racing Developments was thrown in at the deep end to build us a new engine – with not a lot of time to do so. To make things even harder on the guy, he broke his finger, but needless to say he more than delivered with the new motor. So come the time of the third No Limits Racing endurance championship round we were buzzing to get on with the job. Well, kind of...

In truth, we were pretty apprehensive about the gig. Six hours on one bike is a big ask, especially when the bike's being ridden by three different riders, each with their own style and preferences. The last six-hour race I'd done ended with two destroyed Fireblades and a long walk home. Fitness was also going to be a massive factor, because we were each required to do one-hour stints at a time.

Like most of the tracks, Brod had never ridden Donington, so his time in qualifying was spent learning which way the track went. On the flip-side, Ben's a seasoned-pro, with multiple national level wins to his name and a couple of British 250GP lap-records under his belt. Those guys had gone out before me during the 40-minute qualifying window to bang in a

time, and both had complained about the handling of the bike. It took me about three corners to register how badly the little R6 was feeling. Running wide on exits and crabbing on the gas, it was something of a nightmare to ride. But taking the chequered flag, I'd secured us an 11th place start amongst the 41-team line-up, with us being the second fastest 600 team. Whilst the engine had been away being built, we'd also posted the shock off for a refresh, and post-qualifying it came to light that most of the settings had been changed...

The race plan was simple; go fast. Le Mans starts still don't feel natural to me, but I wasn't complaining when I made it into the first corner in fourth place. With a dry track and fantastic weather, I was as surprised as the lead rider when his front tucked from under him on the run down through Craner. We weren't even a lap in and that guy was already down. It was a harsh reminder of how

important it is to get heat in your rubber.

Even with 121bhp on tap, our R6 is no match for the thousands when you get on a straight, which meant I was consumed by half a dozen of them when the circuit went live after a safety car deployment. Picking my way back through in the corners, I eventually worked my way up to third place overall and handing the bike to our ringer, Ben.

Consistent and smooth, Ben wasted no time in getting up to pace and keeping us up at the pointy end. Watching from pitlane, his 250cc-style was great to see as he carved his way through the packs of lapped riders. Ben and I were running consistent 41s, whereas Brod had managed low 50s earlier that morning. His aim was to get into the 40s, and he wasted no time in doing just that having headed out for his hour. With his time almost up, he put in a 1m 46s flat and blew our minds; it's sometimes hard to believe he's a novice.

Aghhhh, where's the track gone?




Bang on it...

We'd always planned a rear tyre change at the three hour mark. Everyone had their own jobs to do, and tools were out at the ready. Having guided Brod into our box, Ian Cooper was slotting the stand under, whilst Neil was set to fill the tank with fuel. Fred Miller was on with the rear axle's nut and I was just standing there like a plum...

Within 30 seconds the bike was fuelled and the rear wheel changed, allowing me to head out on track. Having done an outlap, the pace was resumed and things were looking great. We were in a position to control the pace and I was massively conscious of not making any silly mistakes. Compared to the world endurance, the time we ride for is nothing, but it's enough to get your muscles aching and your brain fried. Half an hour into my second stint, I was forgetting to change the odd gear, or brake at the right place. The more

I thought about concentrating, the more mistakes I made. The second half of the race was clearly affecting a lot of others too.

By the time I'd handed the bike to Brod, having rattled off four hours distance, the number of riders crashing was on the rise. Being an enduro racer, Brod is perhaps the most experienced of us all at going the distance in long races and he performed a treat in his final stint.

After a few big crashes, the clerk of the course took the decision to call it a day and that, quite simply, was that. Poor old Ben never got his second stint, but he was just as happy as the rest of us when Brod came tootling into Parc Ferme, knowing he'd just bagged our third win of the season. It felt a pretty sweet victory, and one we couldn't have anticipated at the start of the meeting. Happy Days! 



The MotoGP line!



ON THE GRID...

Each month we shine the spotlight on a racer who's caught our attention.
Meet David Hall...

The 34-year-old from Nottinghamshire races in the Pirelli Super Series 1000 class and came away from Donington Park with a trio of top five finishes. "I've never really gelled with Donington Park, so to bag some decent results is a bonus. I got down into the 1m 36s at the meeting, which was great. My ZX-10R is still new to me, but it feels like I'm finally getting used to it." One other really interesting thing that David told us was how Cadwell Park's 'Hall Bends' was named after his uncle, who won the chance to christen them in a raffle. Just in case you were wondering, now you know!

RACING KNOWLEDGE: TYRES

Making the right call on tyres is crucial, as Pirelli's Simon Carter explained...

"For most people the biggest decision is working out whether they want a slick or treaded tyre. The latest treaded street legal Pirelli Diablo Supercorsas come in three compounds and compound choice depends on the length of the race, the track conditions, the temperature, etc. The benefit of a street legal tyre is that although it is designated for road use they are designed for the track. The tread pattern will benefit the rider if there are damp patches on the circuit and there is no need to change for an intermediate option. The movement generated in the carcass by the tread design will help keep some heat in the tyre in cold

conditions. Slicks, such as Diablo Superbike are also available in three compounds, but require more set-up time than a street legal product due to a different construction and lack of tread pattern, which means less movement from the tyre. A critical part of getting the best out of your tyre is keeping on top of your tyre pressures. At most trackdays/race meetings you'll find an official tyre fitter who'll be able to advise you on the right pressures for your tyres. Get in a habit of setting your temperatures when the tyres are pre-warmed on tyre warmers, as this will deliver the most consistent results."



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Chaz Davies

After a great month last time round, this one's been a bit up and down. I'm at Portimao ready to rock, though am not included in our media pre-event this time. I'm getting ahead of myself, but the one at Donington saw us all do egg and spoon races, sack races, and so on. When I think of British culture, I'm not sure that these kinds of things spring to mind! And these events get more odd as the races go on...

I've some races to tell you about, of course, and the first was our home round in Italy, at Imola. I had a good run of form going in – three second places and a win – and as I finished second twice there last year I was confident we could push for victory. But we ended up struggling a bit, starting with me being quite ill on the Friday. There was nothing seriously wrong with me, but I just didn't feel 'me' at all – bad headache, night sweats and the like. However, by Sunday it had cleared up and in both races I was pushing for a podium, but was then let down by technical issues each time.

We're still analysing the first race problem, but in the second race we suffered from a fundamental mistake made when the engine was initially built. It was only something tiny, and the good thing is we didn't lose the engine from our allocation. The bad thing is it cost me at least 32 points in the title chase, which is huge. And with it being a home race, with all the Ducati fans' eyes on us, it was really disappointing. Our big race boss, Gigi Dall'Igna, took responsibility for the errors. It's obviously not his fault, per se, but he's chief in charge of the engine development and he said the blame should rest with him for at least one of the issues. He, and we, know it can't happen again and he is right behind the WSB effort even if spends a lot of time in MotoGP.

Being a rider I want things to happen overnight, but sometimes we have to sit tight. You don't expect things like this to happen in the second year of running a bike, it's not a situation I like being in, but sometimes it feels as though we're still in a transition phase with the 1199. We're still looking at where the bike is at, what we have to change it, etc. It is what it is, I guess, and I can only do what I can do with what's provided to me.

So our home round at Donington was next, and we struggled again in places, especially the drive from slow turns and some other areas. It was a real fight, I had to dig really deep to get myself on the podium. I rode exactly at our potential, there wasn't anything left and I was trying to ride around a few different issues too. We had stability and grip issues, there was a lot to try and manage, but I did the best job I could and came away a double podium. So in the end I was happy, as it has always been a tough

Another podium deserves another wheelie, obviously!



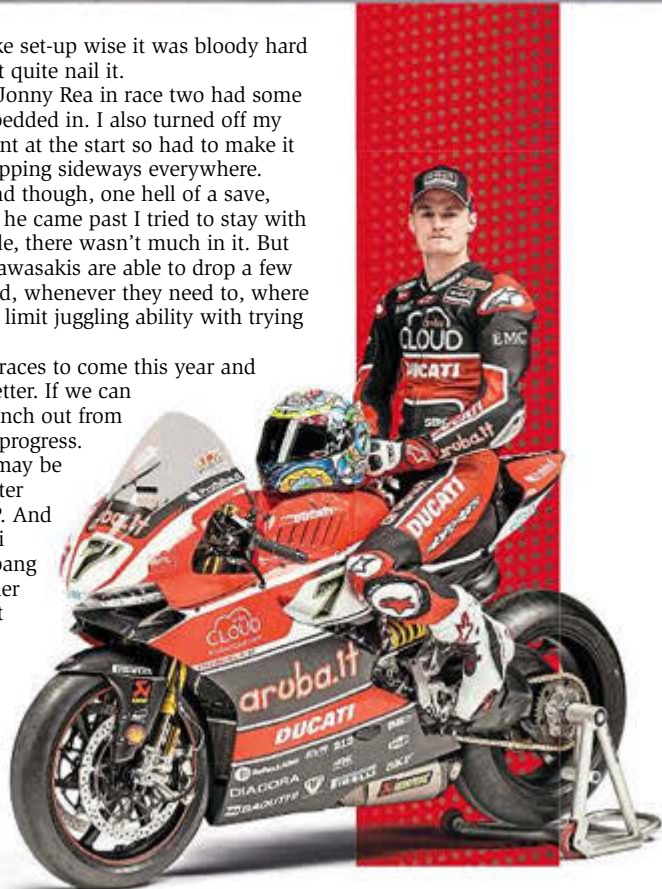
track for me and I felt like set-up wise it was bloody hard work. In short, we didn't quite nail it.

It was funny, me and Jonny Rea in race two had some big slides until the tyre bedded in. I also turned off my launch control by accident at the start so had to make it up and the bike was snapping sideways everywhere. Jonny's moment was mad though, one hell of a save, really impressive! When he came past I tried to stay with him and could for a while, there wasn't much in it. But those two guys on the Kawasakis are able to drop a few tenths per lap on demand, whenever they need to, where as we are already on the limit juggling ability with trying to not over ride the bike.

Anyway, plenty more races to come this year and time to make the bike better. If we can just match our rival's punch out from the slow stuff, that'll be progress.

And Marco Melandri may be coming back we hear, after having a crap time in GP. And we may have Max Biaggi back for Misano and Sepang too. Which means another pair of Italians on decent bikes will be there to be beaten – bring it on!

“BEING A RIDER, I WANT THINGS TO HAPPEN OVERNIGHT, BUT SOMETIMES WE JUST HAVE TO SIT TIGHT...”





Steve Parrish

You'll already know by the time you read this, but it was literally five minutes ago that I heard about Michael Dunlop ditching Yamaha two days before the first TT of 2015. Buildbase BMW are already on their way with a bike for him to use in the next practice session.

One of the reason's for the switch is that apparently the R1 keeps pumping oil out and filling the airbox, which I don't understand. It's been at the NW200 and it didn't do it there, but the word is it burns all its oil and throws it in the airbox. The first time he went out on the R1 he didn't like it, even though they changed it a lot since the NW200.

And Dunlop had a rubbish North West, even in the context of sorting your bike for the TT. You'd expect the sort of problem he's had to appear there. But Yamaha is in trouble as all the eggs are in the Michael Dunlop basket. True, Dean Harrison will stay on an R1, but he's having issues too. For me, you don't sign up Michael Dunlop for the TT and not give him the best bike. That bike should come from Japan. Yamaha finally shipped in one of the factory's top guys, but it was too late. I heard Michael was furious that it took Yamaha so long to respond. He was 4mph down on his lap time on the R1 against his rivals – no wonder something had to give.

The North West was pretty good though, apart from the wind and the poor spectator who got injured. It was another of those cases where the NW200 has nightmare weather. We did get some good races; Alastair Seeley was great and I enjoyed seeing John McGuinness back on the horse too. We all had Dunlop down as the winner on the Yamaha though, which obviously didn't happen.

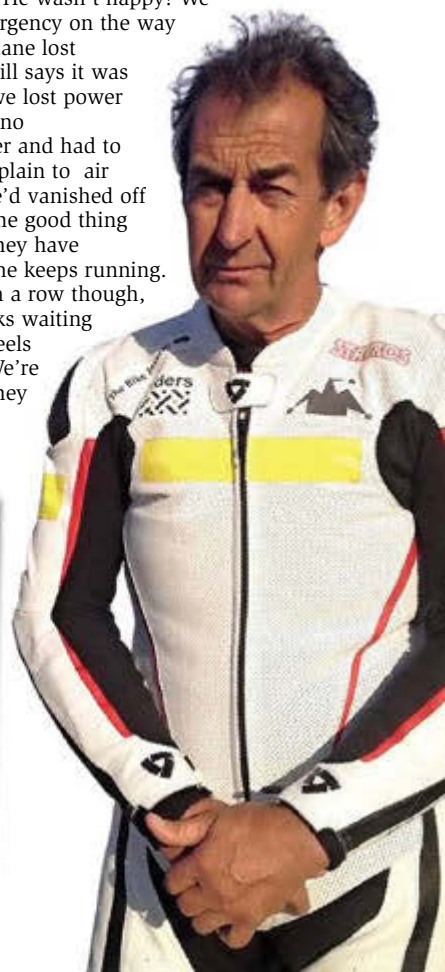
We were commenting for over ten hours straight in the end, but I'd rather be doing that than sitting on the grid on a day like that. I don't miss the strain and the stresses of that at all. I remember my last NW, I was sat on the line in the rain wondering what the hell I was doing. It turned out to be my last year, but these days if the riders don't want to ride in the wet, they don't. We never had that choice! And we had no wet tyres go to the NW either, just cut road tyres. It was shame to miss the big race due to the wind, but even with the time extensions they got for this year they're stuck. You can't race on a Sunday there, although we may see action on the Friday in future.

Did you see Guy Martin's rant at the NW? About it being boring? He quickly backtracked on those comments after everyone from the team to the organisers had a quiet

word with him. I think it's because he wasn't quick enough there, so the frustration came through at the wrong moment in front of a camera. He won't accept start money for the TT so that he doesn't have to do media or fan commitments, did you know that? He's keeps saying he's been diagnosed with Asperger's apparently, but if he's got it so have I! It's a shame for some of his fans that would like to meet him, but that's just our Guy!

Switching to MotoGP, what about Jorge Lorenzo? Wow, he's bang on it now. If he gets a run over the next four or five races, he'll win the title, I think. I won't ever bet against Marc Marquez though, even if his wheels have properly fallen off this year with Honda getting lost in development. There's still enough time and points there for him to win, but when Jorge is looking this good, who can match him? Certainly not Rossi or Pedrosa, and Valentino's lead has been chipped away by Jorge to nothing now. It'll be an interesting year from here on in, that's for sure. Marquez and, more specifically, Honda need to sort their shit out, right now.

I had a couple of funnies happen recently, the first with my mate's plane at the North West. I got there before him and took a leak underneath his engine. So he arrived and was checking his plane after seeing the puddle, then stuck his fingers in it to see if it was fuel! Then he finally twigged his plane was air-cooled when he removed his cowl. He wasn't happy! We also had a minor emergency on the way to the TT when the plane lost electricity. Michelle still says it was my hair curlers. But we lost power above Liverpool, had no communications either and had to use our mobiles to explain to air traffic control why we'd vanished off the system. Luckily, the good thing about planes is that they have magnetos so the engine keeps running. For the second year in a row though, the IOM had fire trucks waiting for us in case our wheels hadn't come down. We're the only excitement they get in the IOM, long may that continue!

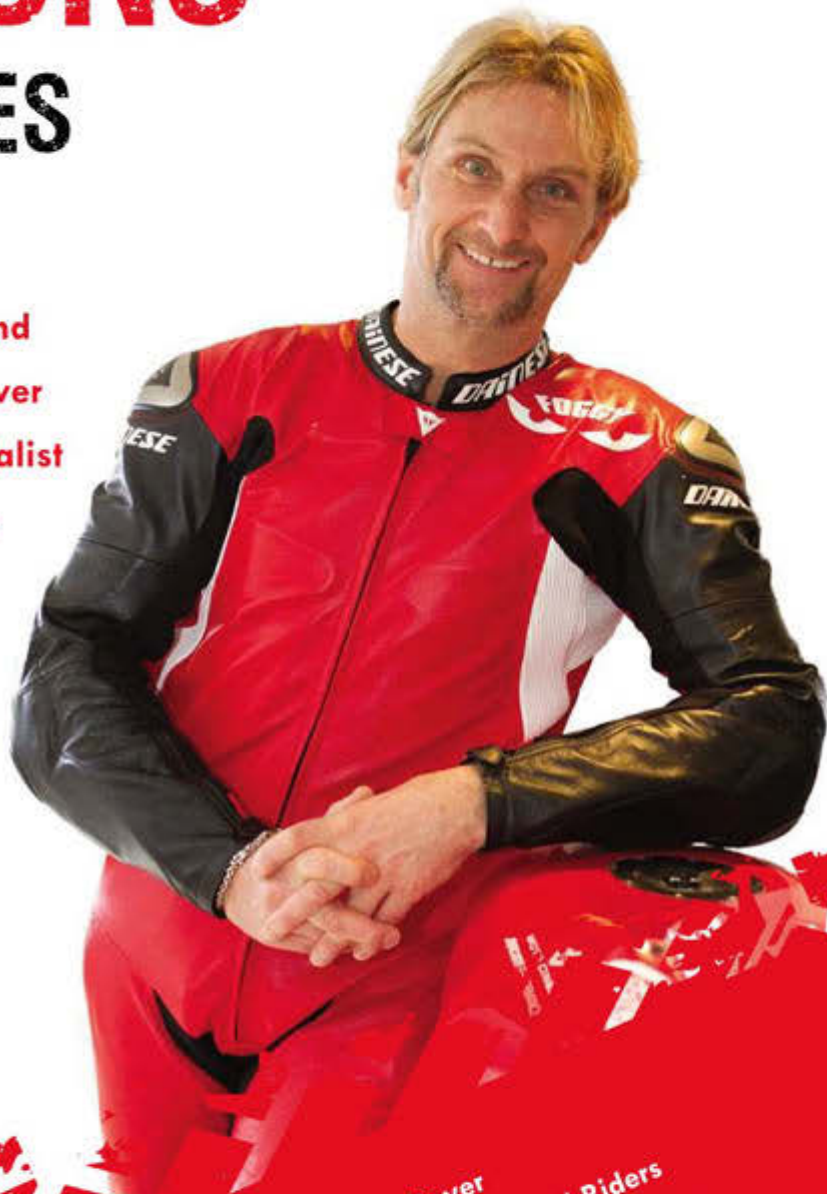


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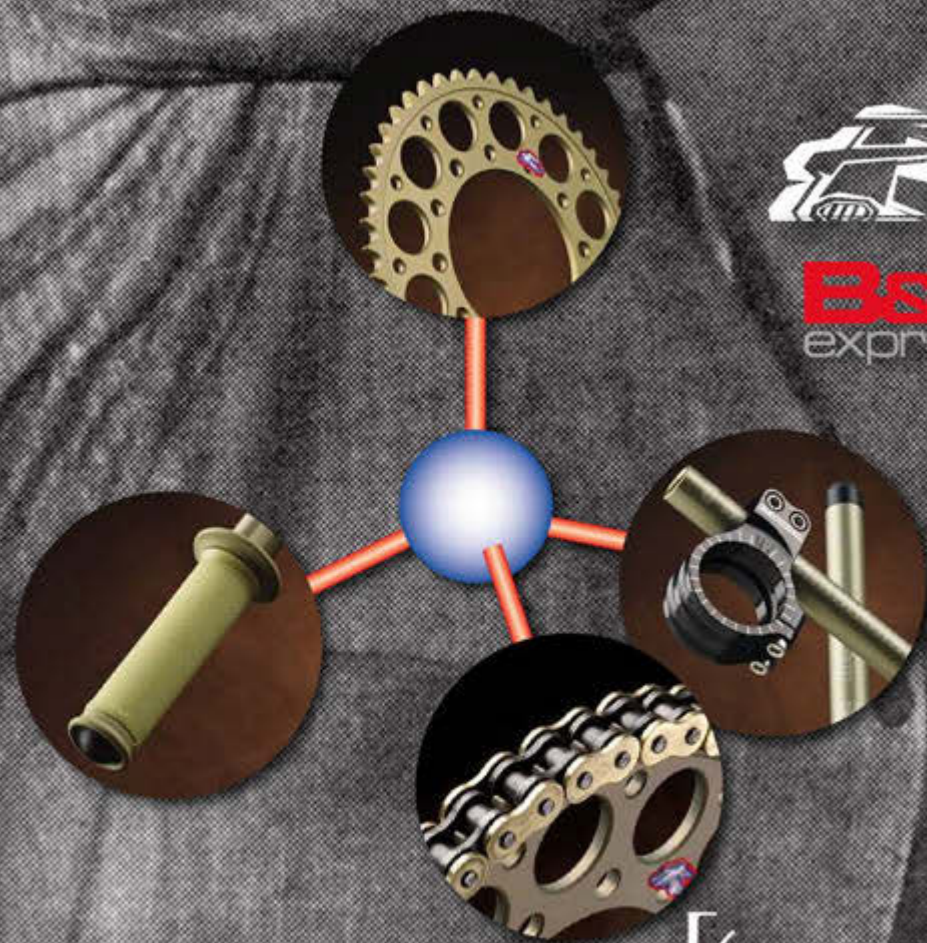
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